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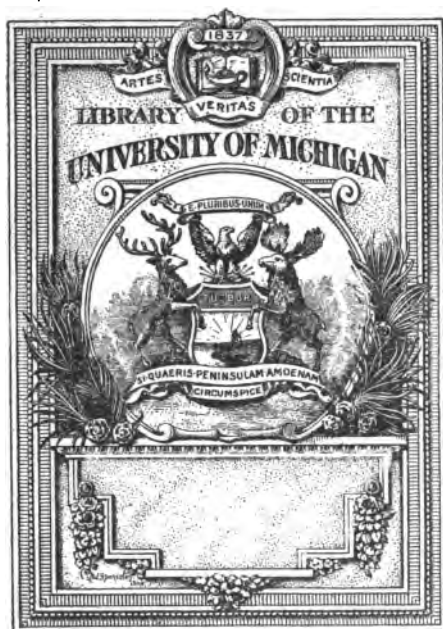
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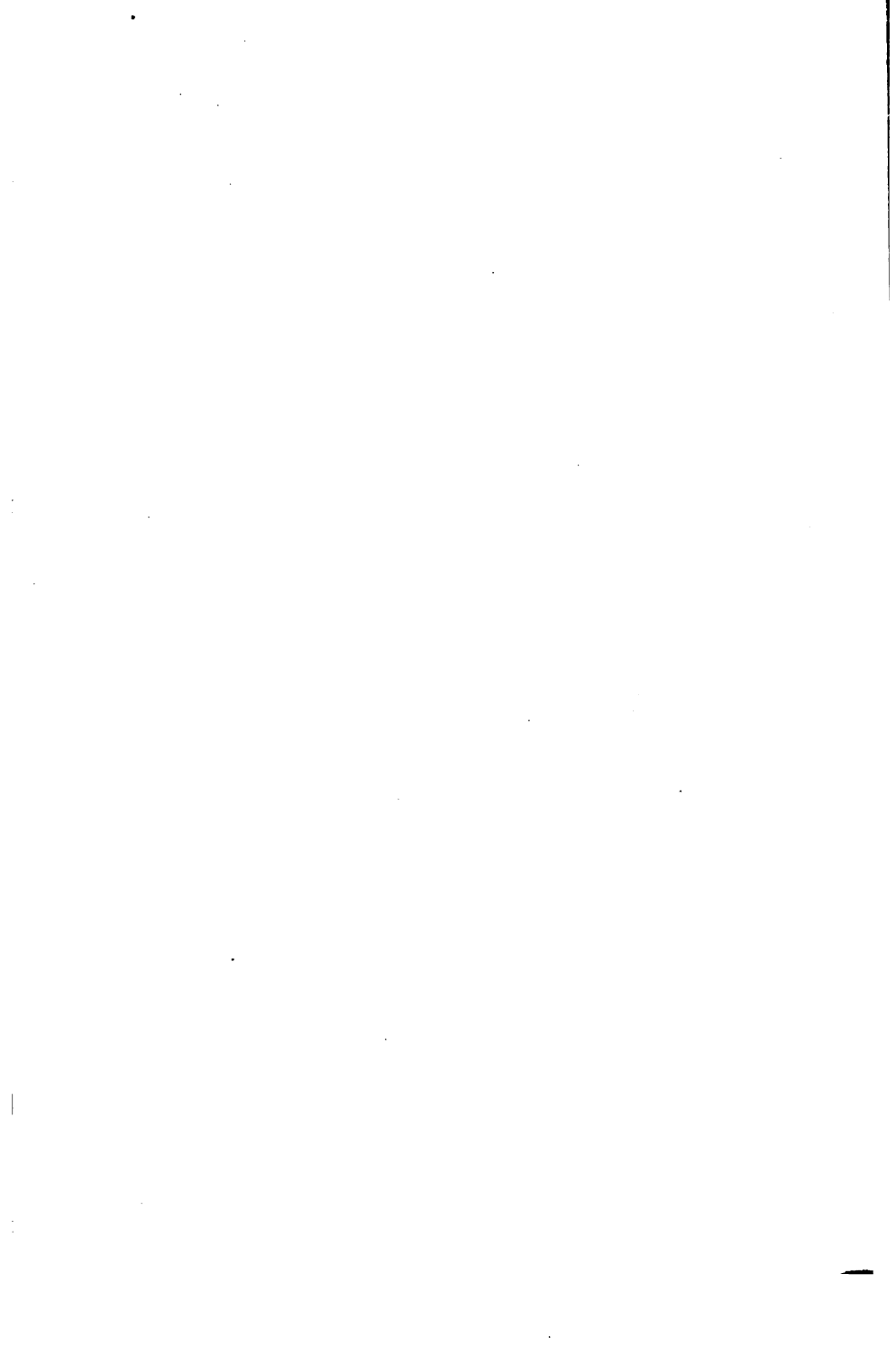
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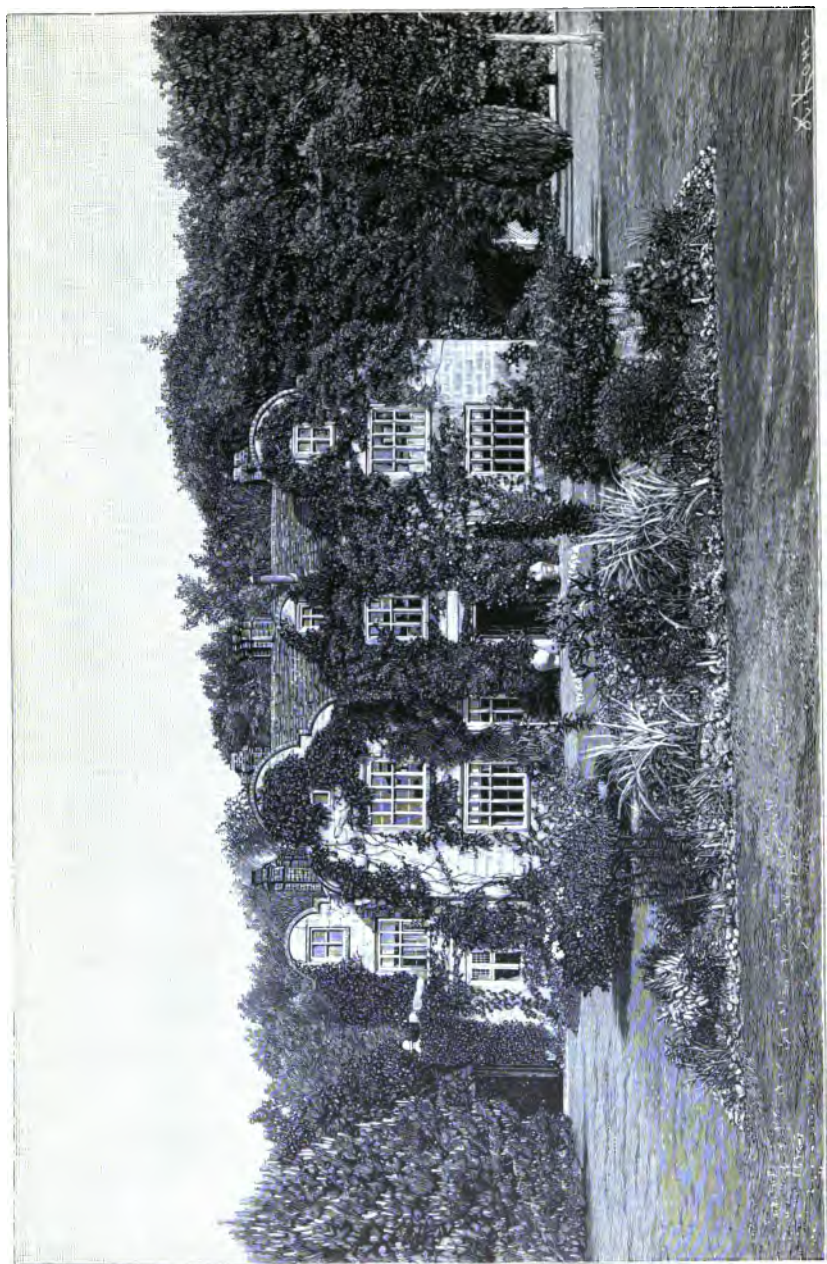
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IN VERONICA'S GARDEN







'NOT ALTOGETHER EXILED FROM THE GARDEN THAT I LOVE'

IN A NEW EDITION

MACMILLAN & CO.

NEW YORK

1895

MADE IN U.S.A.



IN VERONICA'S GARDEN

5-5-68 C.

BY

ALFRED AUSTIN

Omnia suppeditat porro Natura ; neque ulla

Res animi pacem delibat tempore in ullo.

Titi Lucretii Cari De Rerum Natura, Lib. III. v. 23-24

Valori. Is that your garden that I smell? How sweet!

Savonarola: a Tragedy, Act IV. scene 6

WITH FOURTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS

THIRD THOUSAND

London

MACMILLAN AND CO.

AND NEW YORK

1895

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TO
DEAR LAMIA



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IN VERONICA'S GARDEN

April 23rd.

You would have thought the King was coming.

Our newspapers and cross-country letters are delivered by the rural postman about eleven of the forenoon; and it so happened that on this particular morning I was awaiting, with the feverish anxiety peculiar to the amateur politician, the result of an important bye-election, while Lamia, I well knew, was not a little impatient to learn through her private correspondence how long she could remain with us, and how best to arrange other visit-

ing plans when for awhile she had to deprive us of her always welcome society. But, if the fate of an Empire had been depending on the morning telegrams, I should not have dared remove the wrapper of the newspaper that had just been put into my hand. Lamia, with more courage, applied a small paper-cutter to one of her envelopes ; but, severely reproved by a look from Veronica, she at once desisted.

‘Surely,’ said Veronica, ‘you can read your letters later ; and as for the newspapers,’ she added, turning towards me, ‘you always say there is nothing in them ; and even if there were, *on this occasion* I think you might control your curiosity till the afternoon.’

On this occasion ! What do you suppose it was ? Nothing less, but certainly nothing more, than the return of the Poet from a six weeks’ holiday on the other side of the Alps ; and his home-coming had imbued Veronica with an engrossing solicitude which she strove to impart to Lamia and to me, and which accordingly we simulated to the best of our ability. Whatever our private estimate of the importance of the arrival of this particular traveller, we had to act as though we also regarded it as an event of quite

regal consequence ; so, leaving second-post letters unopened, and the London papers unscanned, we started off obsequiously, basket on arm, to the nearest wood in quest of primroses.

‘And mind,’ said Veronica, flashing after us a parting injunction, which conveyed to us afresh her profound conviction of our incapacity, to say nothing of Lamia’s probable frivolity, ‘mind you gather them with long stalks, and do not mix the coral-tinted windflowers with the white ones. And bring plenty of leaves.’

‘Hands that the rod of Empire might have swayed,’

murmured Lamia, as soon as we were well down the orchard-drive and out of earshot ; and though, as I did not wish to encourage her in her insurrectionary impulses, I affected not to hear, I inwardly assented to the pertinence of the quotation.

It is really very absurd the fuss one woman will make over one man, when he belongs to her, and she wishes to please him. Notwithstanding the nuptials of Veronica and the Poet, I have not been altogether exiled from The Garden that I Love. I come and I go ; and, though it is now titularly Veronica’s, not mine, and I have to conform more or less in my management of it to

her wishes, I am still supposed to be responsible, if not for its merits, at any rate for its defects. When its flowers abound, they are imputed to the sympathetic prodigality with which Heaven naturally furnishes materials to wreath round poetic brows. When they are scant or laggard, I am held accountable, and am made to feel either that I am waxing desultory in supervision, or that the gardener has committed the high crime and misdemeanour of characteristic dilatoriness. During the last fortnight it has been pretty plainly intimated to us that there is a striking contrast, little to our credit, between the way we conduct things out-of-doors and the manner in which they are regulated within. Veronica's domestics are enjoined to ring the dinner-bell at a certain hour, and the clock of the Horse Guards is not more punctual. The storeroom door is unlocked on certain appointed mornings—I am ashamed to say I cannot name them—at a fixed time ; and, while Veronica, in spotless apron, walks severely from shelf to shelf, and from jar to jar, petitions from below are brought in with punctilious precision. Woe to the housemaid who has forgotten something that is needed, and who has to ask for it before again the day for domestic distribution

comes round. There is a day for this, and a day for that ; and the laundress from the neighbouring town—we do not wash at home, since I really could not bear to see the very whitest linen flapping within sight of the Garden that I Love—comes and goes under the operation of a law as fixed as that of the Medes and Persians. Why cannot peas ripen and roses bloom with like punctuality? Veronica is reputed to be a person of even exceptional intelligence ; but I have never been able to impress upon her for any length of time that Nature is not constituted quite in the same fashion as herself. Perhaps I should be unwise to press the argument too far, or I might end by making her think somewhat ill of Nature.

As a rule, she treats me and my cherished partner—have I not said that Nature is a sleeping, or rather an unsleeping, partner, who works for us without claiming any return for her capital?—with a certain compassionate patience, though it is plain she thinks the two of us lamentably unmethodical ; regarding me as the chief culprit, since she is convinced I could make Nature mend her pace if I only would. But ‘on this occasion’—I hope you have not forgotten the phrase—she has stimulated, reproved, cross-questioned me with merciless

pertinacity. Would the crocuses under the oak have faded before he returned? Would the daffodils still be in full bloom? Surely there would be some early tulips in perfection, and would not the *Tiarella cordifolia*, or foam-flower, and the *Trillium*, or wood-lily, be in all their beauty? Did I not intend to roll the lawn again with the heavy horse-roller, and when were the edges of the grass going to be cut with the edging-iron? She complimented me warmly on the result of a new experiment I have made in the borders under the drawing-room and dining-room windows; but could nothing be done to make the *La Belle Blanchisseuse* Hyacinths and the Saint Brigid Anemones straightway open all their beauty to the sun? The offices have all been whitewashed, the new wall-papers all are up, every room has been 'turned out,' the pictures have been hung afresh, not a workman nor workwoman lingers about the place, and every corner of the house seems to distil a savour of sweetness and cleanliness. The urns—may I call them the celebrated urns, since to us and our little world they are such?—have been rubbed and polished till they shine like burnished breastplates. (I have been told that plate and glass can be kept in first-rate condition

only by men-servants. I can only say I wish you could see Veronica's.) All these various and important operations have been accomplished with a view to the arrival of the distinguished traveller. Why cannot the garden that I profess to love rival in its timely efflorescence this responsive household organisation? And that North Corner, that was to be so wonderful? Is He to return from the wild-flowers of an Italian Spring and be greeted by nothing but a few clusters of double daffodils, and here and there some dog's-tooth violets?

Being of a sanguine, not to say of a cowardly, disposition, I strove to propitiate Veronica with promises of rapid evolution that would be sure to occur before the King—I mean the Poet—should arrive. But this only moved her to assume the sombre mantle of Cassandra; and I confess I myself only half believed in my glowing predictions. It had been a tantalisingly backward April, and Winter still seemed tugging at the skirts of Spring, and trying to keep her from our outstretched arms. But Nature avenged herself on my want of faith, and administered an agreeable reproof to Veronica's gloomy predictions. None of the Seasons conform to drill-ground pace, but the steps of Spring are the most incalculable of all. When grown-up

folk go out for a walk they maintain throughout it a fairly even stride, and they can tell with tolerable exactitude when they will arrive at this stage of their excursion, and when that other will be reached. But take a young child with you, and you find yourself moving along, now at one pace, now at another. Your little companion first will walk, then will run, will now halt, now sit down, will gather wild-flowers, then throw them away, will wander out of your sight, will be devious and delightful, but never do the same thing or go at the same pace for two minutes together. It is the same with Spring, whose charm lies in the irregularity and uncertainty of its progress. When Veronica first began to be so distressingly solicitous, even the warmest and most sheltered corner of the garden betrayed the lateness of the season. But just as her pertinacious inquiries had set up even in me an artificial impatience, there came the softest and tenderest rain from the south, which lasted, off and on, for a day and a night, and the growth of a month seemed to have been accomplished, as by a stroke of the enchanter's wand, in twenty-four hours. Though the wind had previously been keen and parching, a sun rarely tempered by clouds had warmed the

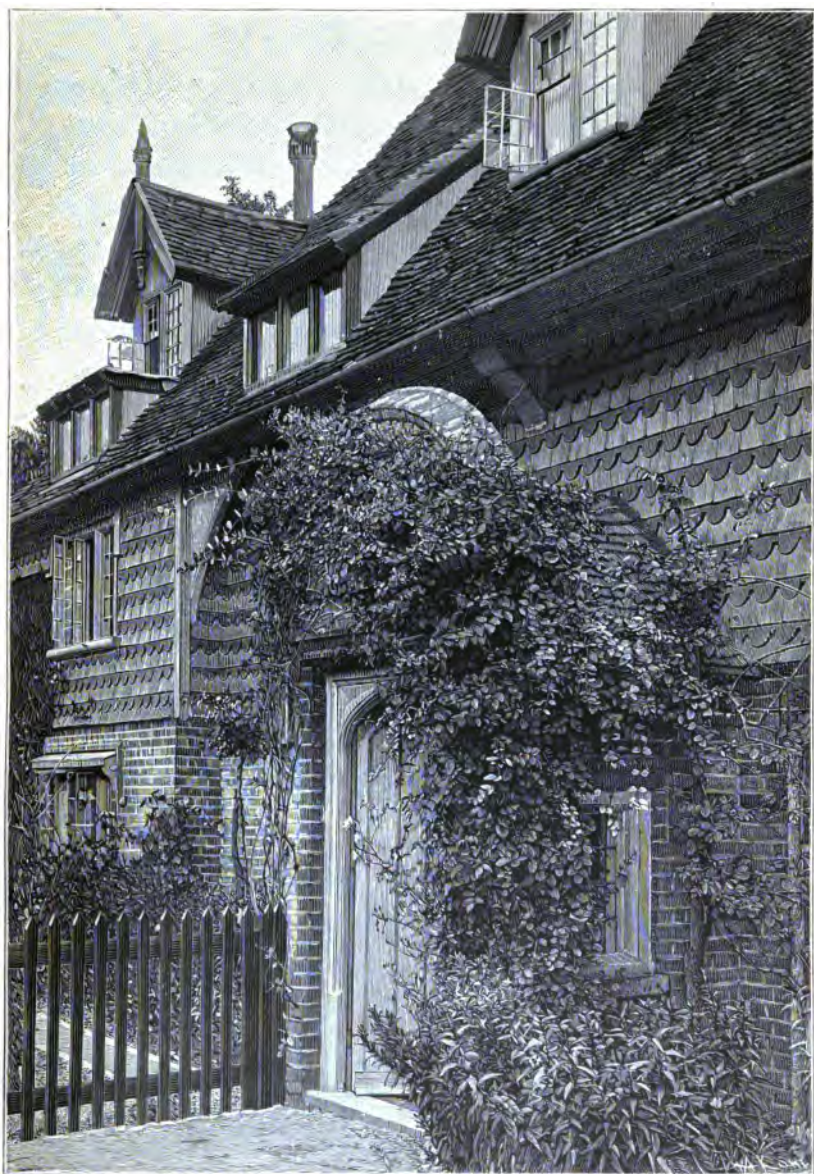
ground through and through, and so prepared it to turn to full account the tardy but now stimulating showers. Then followed a fortnight of brilliant sunshine and a high glass, though the weather-vane never veered beyond south by south-west; and Veronica's fear now was, not that April should greet her Poet churlishly, but that he should be too late to see the beauty of the later fosterlings of March.

I hope that now she is satisfied; but at present she is much too anxious everything should be looking still better, to acknowledge that anything is looking well. Lamia is more lavish in her admiration, and declares I have entered into a conspiracy with Nature to confuse the Calendar, and to make it impossible to say whether we are in Aries, in Taurus, or in some other constellation. The cuckoo, the only egotist of whom we never tire, tells afresh the old self-glorifying tale that sounds always new; yet, under the old Oak by the tennis-ground, purple and white crocuses still linger, though the yellow ones, which, by dint of rather prodigal expenditure in wire-netting, I this year saved from the rabbits, have vanished, leaving their green leaves behind them. In a day or two, even the former will disappear. But the single

daffodils will more than take their place, and justify the name of wild garden we have somewhat ambitiously given to it. Kept back in growth by the cold winds and chilly nights, and therefore safe from the perils that attend precocity, the forget-me-not in the six large beds on the lawn, that have to do both Spring and Summer service, is a sheet of blue, without gap or failure; and the tulips, which, according to Veronica, were not going to flower at all, have lifted up their transparent chalices as at the word of command; the *Keizers-Kroon* in this bed, the *Rosa Mundi* in this, the yellow *Pottebakker* in that other. The yet finer and more fanciful sorts, the *Gesneriana* and the *Gregei*, display themselves in the borders, and likewise in the herbaceous beds, without the setting of myosotis, that would but derogate from their self-sufficing loveliness. They are in groups of five, or seven, as it happens, intercolated, in obedience to a design I trust you would not observe, among the now rapidly-growing perennials. A great show of these, as yet, there is not; and, if there were, they would not afford a fair chance to the flowering bulbs that by right precede them. In the North Corner—I beg pardon, in Poet's Corner, for was it not so christened?—where I

gave myself so much pains with the soil and the drainage, there are Trumpet Daffodils that would, I think, carry off the prize in the opinion of any dispassionate judge, could they but be seen and appraised where they grow. Were the decision left to myself, I should not know to which to award the crown: whether to *Sir Watkin*, to *Emperor*, to *Empress*, to *Henry Irving*, or to the white *Swan Neck*, which the learned, I believe, call *Cernuus*. That, as we all know, signifies 'with down-looking face'; and you would probably think me very foolish if you knew how often I have stooped to look under them, to contemplate their pale-coloured cups and silvery-white perianths. Under the old gray wall the *Anemone Apennina* has justified my predictions concerning its fitness for our climate, and has a profusion of pale-blue flowers. By the rockwork edging to the border, the *Scilla Siberica* and the *Chionodoxa Lucilæ* compete with each other for our admiration. I prefer the former. The Poet will not see how well the early out-door Cyclamens have succeeded there, for they are over. But the wood-lily, that snow-white flower that blooms out of the very centre of the green leaf, might have known to a day the date of his return; and the dog's-tooth

violets, about whose liking for the spot where they were planted I had entertained grave doubts, are covered with blooms both white and pink. But the chief glory of Poet's Corner, at this moment, is the single *Kerria* against the gray wall. The double *Kerria* you may see in many a cottage garden, and here, too, it has long had a home, for its early-flowering yellow rosettes make a mighty show at a time when a little ostentation is sorely needed. But the colour of the single variety is brighter and more definite. I was told it is delicate; but it has done wonders in a single twelvemonth, and I can see that next year it will claim for itself, and it shall certainly have, a goodly portion of the wall to itself. The Crown Imperials I got from Holland in the Autumn have made sturdy growth, but have not flowered, for they resent disturbance as much as an Irish tenant; but the old ones have such towering stalks, and such heavy canopies at the top of these, that I have reluctantly had to stake some of them. If you asked me what the garden smells of most, I should say of wallflowers; for though, in the open, they mostly succumbed to the cruel frosts of the bygone winter, under the shelter of the house, on either side, they weathered the trial, branched out



‘ UNDER THE SHELTER OF THE HOUSE ’



profusely, and are, I think, finest in growth, in colour, and in scent, where they look north. Why have I said nothing concerning violets? I have been asked more than once. It was a grave omission, but silence arose, not from their scarcity, but from their profusion. They are everywhere, nestling where they will, and everywhere at home. White ones are growing round the very doorstep; and, when they have done flowering, their strong green leaves keep the roots of the clambering roses cool all through the heat of summer. Let the Poet come from the land where the boys call '*Mammole! Mammole!*' in the classic streets, he will find no lack of them in the garden that he too loves.

'Quite heavenly!' said Lamia, settling down in a most becoming position in the very heart of the wood, and placing her basket on the ground by her side. 'I could stay here all day. Just listen to that nightingale!'

She had evidently forgotten, or had decided to ignore, Veronica's parting injunctions, and the very purpose of our being where we were. But she seated herself with so seductive a grace, and her words described so accurately what I myself also felt, that, far from rebuking her for her

truant behaviour, I quietly followed her example, and surrendered myself to the sounds and scents of the enchanting scene. Now the call of the cuckoo, duly mellowed by distance, vivified the morning air, now piped a blackbird, now warbled a whitethroat, now shrilled a misselthrush, now, even now, but more rarely, cooed a ringdove. Now the song of the nightingale ascended to the very summit of voluptuous joy, and then quavered quickly down the sharp descents of pain. In truth, they were all carolling and chanting together; and it was we who were listening now rather to one, now rather to another note in this jubilant chorus of the Spring. Broad, green paths or 'drives,' as we call them, met, separated, and meandered through the wood, or, at least, they were green where the primroses, in the very heyday of their bloom, had not awhile made them golden. This universal flower—for nowhere have I travelled where I have not found it—is to the wildwood and to the lane what the cultivated rose is to the garden. Truly, we may say of it, as an old Dutch writer of the seventeenth century says of the rose, *Omnes inter flores principatum facile obtinet*; it enjoys indisputable primacy among the flowers of the grove. It is as hardy in deed and in truth as it is tender

in seeming ; and Veronica's Poet is surely right
when he says to the primroses,

Nothing ever makes you less
Gracious to ungraciousness.
March may bluster up and down,
Pettish April sulk and frown ;
Closer to their skirts you cling,
Coaxing Winter to be Spring.

‘I wish I could be like that,’ said Lamia,
‘gracious to ungraciousness’—for I had just cited
the lines ; ‘but it is a virtue far beyond me.
Tell me,’ she added, ‘do you think the song of
the nightingale is really sad ?’

This is the sort of question Lamia now propounds not infrequently, and I draw my own conclusions from this suggestive change in the character of her inquiries. Ever since she suddenly discovered that Love is *not* altogether a literary invention, and that she could not bring herself, with the best will in the world, to marry a sumptuous Garden, let the owner of it be who he might, she has displayed an edifying attitude of almost penitential humility, in regard to the study of the affections, which greatly gratifies the Poet. I can speak only from surmise of his relations with Lamia, but I cannot doubt

he has seconded my endeavours to eradicate from her mind the belief she once at least shared with too many young maidens of our time, that felicity in marriage is not to be obtained without a very ample allowance of material enjoyment. Indeed, he gave himself the trouble to write for her benefit—for I feel sure it is to her it was addressed—a poem on ‘Marrying in the Valley,’ which was founded on the true story of an Italian peasant girl Veronica and I once knew at the *Bagni di Lucca*, and who confessed to us she had married a well-to-do man of middle life she did not particularly care for, because he lived down in the vale, and she was tired of going up hill every evening, after work was over, to high-perched Lugliano, where her parents, and her more stalwart admirers, dwelt. The poem was, I think, not very successful in execution, however praiseworthy in sentiment, and much too long to be committed to memory, but I recollect it concluded somewhat thus:

Give *me* a roof where Wisdom dwells,
Where honeysuckle smiles and smells,
A bleating flock, some lowing kine,
An honest welcome always mine,
A homely draught, a humble meal,

Leisure to live, to think, to feel,
A narrow plot, a prospect wide,
A patch upon the mountain side !
From these my heart you will not wean
For Fashion's tinsel, Splendour's sheen,
The Sceptre's favour, Senate's prize,
No, nor the Empire of your eyes.
Farewell ! The Valley be your own !
And I will scale the heights,—alone.

I fancy this sermon in verse, happening to be delivered at a timely moment, had its effect in helping Lamia to look on life with less material eyes ; and we all of us, and not altogether selfishly, congratulated ourselves on the circumstance that Lamia's recent experience, of which she is now heartily ashamed, leaves her free to be as frequent a visitor as ever in the unambitious Garden that we Love.

Partly because yet another nightingale began to flute overhead, and partly because of the train of thought Lamia's question had stirred in me, I suppose I was not so prompt in replying to it as I might have been. Indeed, it remained unanswered, until she again said, with a little touch of impatience—

‘Do tell me, for I want to know, do you think the note of the nightingale really sad?’

‘Perhaps,’ I answered, ‘the belief that it is so, is likewise only a literary invention.’

‘Don’t!’ she said; and there was such genuine pathos in her voice that I would fain have taken back the words. But I knew a verbal expression of regret would only accentuate my want of tact, so I rejoined as quickly as I could:

‘I almost think it is, but by no means exclusively sad. If the Poet were here, I imagine he would tell us that, like the most beautiful music, like the best poetry, indeed, like life and the universe itself, it has in it the spirit alike of gladness and of sadness; and if it stirs in us a tender melancholy, is it not that, as Wordsworth says, pleasant thoughts bring sad thoughts to the mind? No other bird produces this effect in us; and that is why it is conceded the primacy in song that primroses have among wild-flowers. The blackbird—listen to him now that he has ceased scolding!—is piping to himself without a thought of being overheard, and because it pleases him to pipe. The throstle, on the contrary, sings to the gallery, determined not to be outdone, and resolved that the whole world shall know he is the *tenore robusto* of songsters; while the cuckoo, cheerful cynic and self-indulgent worldling that he

is, seems to make a mock of his musical gift, almost as Byron does in *Don Juan*. The ring-dove is so manifestly happy, it is impossible to associate with its note any sentiment save that of quiet, continuous, domestic peace. But the nightingale is intensely human in its upward striving after joy, and its plaintive confession of failure, in its gladness that ends in sadness, in the passionate longing that subsides into a wail. I wish the Poet had been here to explain it better ; but I have put it as well as I can.'

No one indulges in so long a discourse as that without feeling some curiosity, when he brings it to a close, as to how it has impressed his audience ; and, as Lamia remained silent, I turned to gather from her countenance some faint indication of her approval. But, notwithstanding my eloquence, for I cannot think it was in consequence of it, she had lapsed into the Virgilian *dulces sub arbore somni*, and returned to my inquiring gaze the mortifying response of closed eyelids. This utter insensibility to the distinction I had been drawing between the notes of different birds, at once recalled me to a sense of duty ; and, rebuking her for her oblivion of our important mission, I rose to my feet, began energetically gathering primroses, and

somewhat sharply summoned her to do the same.

‘You are quite mistaken,’ she said with unruffled suavity, ‘in supposing I was asleep. I heard all you said, though at the same time there was running through my head the sonnet Veronica recited to us yesterday, and which is perhaps not inappropriate to our soothing surroundings.

Here have I learnt the little that I know,
Here where in these untutored woodland ways
The primrose, all unconscious of our praise,
Dimpled the dainty coverlet of the snow,
March's first-born, and, still averse to go,
Though drowsy-lidded, dallies and delays
When, dawning through the bluebell's heavenly haze,
June into full mid-summer broadeneth slow.
Forgive me, friend, if these mean more to me,
Imbue my being with a deeper lore,
Come nearer to my heart, instruct me more
In what I am and what I fain would be,
Even than Sabine summit, Oscan shore,
Or Tiber curving tawnily to the sea.’

I have no doubt it is very nice to have one's sonnets recited in dulcet tones by a charming creature reclining among woodland primroses; and, had the Poet been present, I daresay he would not have been insensible to the compliment thus

paid him. But it was hardly to be expected that I should be propitiated by the recital of another person's verse, and I again exhorted Lamia to desist from her sentimentality,—I knew the word would bring her to her feet,—and betake herself to the task on which she had been despatched. Once at work, she seemed resolved to make up for lost time, and I must own her basket of primroses, when gathered, transcended mine both in bulk and quality.

‘Let us make the best of our way home,’ I said, ‘for I am sure Veronica will have got through her own offices of welcome, and will be awaiting us with some impatience.’

She had indeed laid every corner of the garden under tribute, to do honour to her returning consort. As a rule, she objects to huge boughs and branches of blossom being brought into the house, partly because she conceives the cutting of them to be wasteful, and partly because, when they begin to fade, they impart a certain air of untidiness to their surroundings. But, ‘on this occasion,’ she had completely subordinated her prejudices, if I may venture so to designate them, to what she knows to be the Poet's liking for lavishness in floral decoration, and had adorned

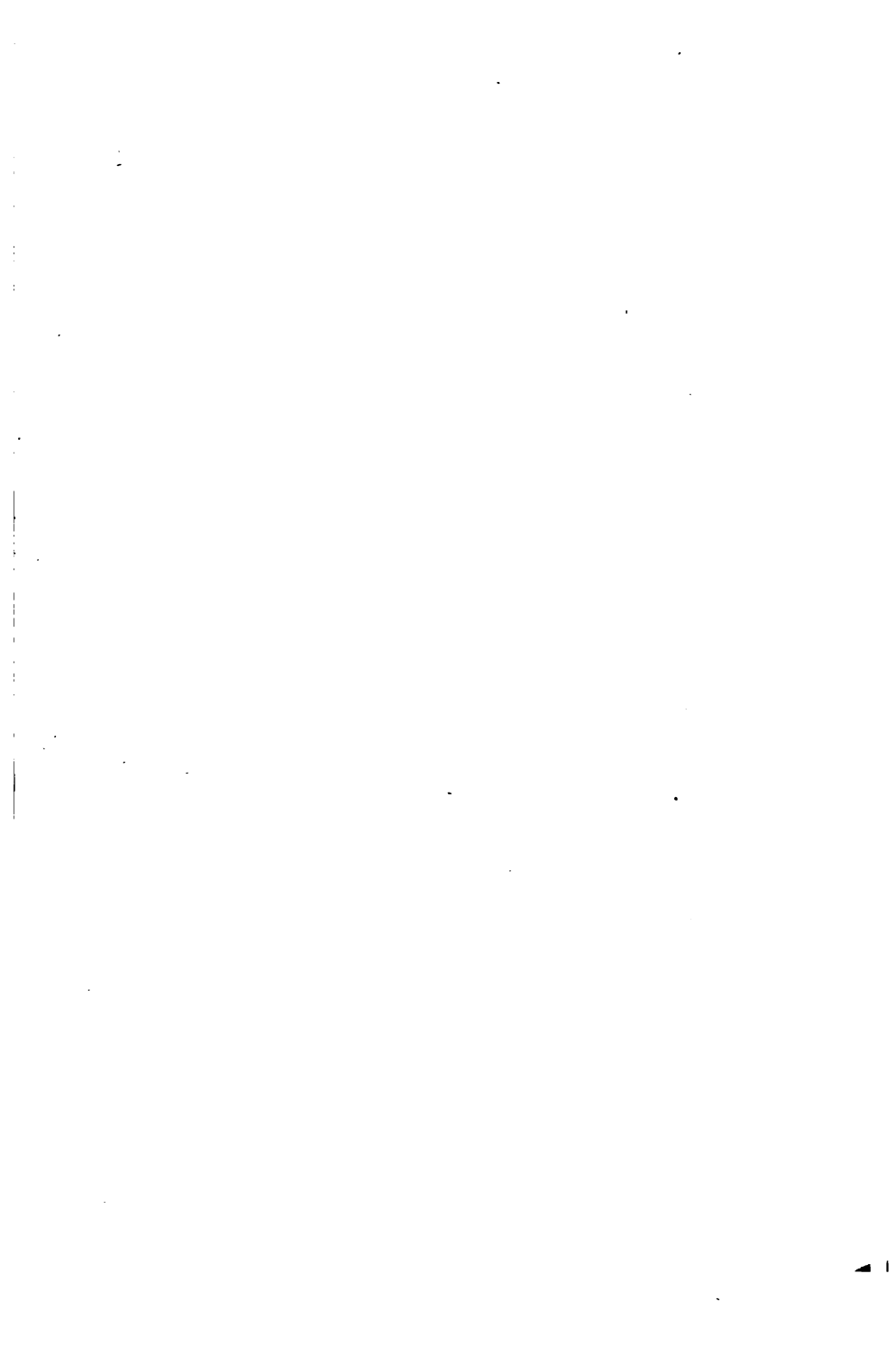
every room, his study more especially, with a prodigal and unsparing hand. Indeed I was half alarmed at the gap I knew she must have made in my favourite borders. The primroses, we now ascertained, were reserved for the dining-room table, where none but their wildwood faces were to greet our own ; and, as almost any one has handicraft enough to put primroses in bowl and vase, we were permitted, indeed it was evident we were expected, to share in that final labour.

It was not till somewhat late in the afternoon that discipline was relaxed, and that, while Lamia retired to her correspondence, I sought a sheltered nook wherein to peruse the printed tidings from the great world, of which we should otherwise remain ignorant. The result of the poll, which I had been burning to know, not being in harmony with my private desires, I soon again was what Lamia calls 'pottering' in the garden ; an irreverent modern phrase for the incessant solicitude I feel concerning its condition, and for the sympathy I lavish on its progress. I found nothing amiss anywhere, save where the berberis had not yet recovered from the abnormal severity of the winter season ; and I frequently paused to smile over the gay, indeed the almost gaudy, appearance of floral groups

which Veronica's predictions had condemned to sterility, or to exasperating tardiness of bloom. But I found myself perpetually returning to the twin borders under the house, whose beauty I have acknowledged has wrung from her a tribute of unqualified eulogy. I had resolved to make a new experiment there, though I well knew failure would cost me my reputation. In them I planted, in large bold groups, every bulb and plant known to me which ought to flower, in good garden soil, between Candlemas Day and Shakespeare's Birthday. When I say good garden soil, you must not suppose I mean what would pass for such according to the average standard. It was a mixture of rich loam, thoroughly rotted leaf-mould, some almost pulverised peat, a judicious proportion of sand, and of course a handsome contribution, in thorough condition, from the manure-yard. In a word, it was soil in which you might have potted your greenhouse plants, and any gardener knows what that means. Winter aconites, crocuses of every hue, hyacinths, white, pink, and purple, daffodils of sorts, narcissus, tulips early and late, candytuft, wallflowers both nut-brown and golden yellow, forget-me-not, polyanthus laced and striped, primula japonica

and primula rosea, these, and more, I invited to bloom, either simultaneously or in gradual, unperceived succession, leaving each other ample room, yet among them covering the ground with a carpet of harmonious colour. Then, in order to produce the suggestion of human intention which is indispensable in a border so closely annexed to the house as almost to form a portion of it, I edged it with two well-defined lines of the yellow *Alyssum*, and the new large-flowering *Aubretia*, the latter forming, so to speak, the outer frame of the gorgeous picture. I know I have wasted words in trying to describe it, but the eulogiums of Veronica will perhaps be accepted as a guarantee that my experiment was, and still is at this moment, successful beyond my fondest expectation. She is good enough to say that more than one stranger, gazing on our April garden this year, has exclaimed, 'Why, it is like Summer!' The commendation is generous, but not quite accurate; for, like Spring itself, it is more beautiful than Summer.

I need hardly say that Lamia and I were not present at the actual arrival of the much-awaited traveller. But, when we returned, about an hour before sundown, from a second woodland stroll,





‘WHEN OUR LITTLE MANOR-HOUSE WAS ENLARGED’

taken this time entirely in the interest of our own satisfaction, and without any harrying sense of responsibility, we found Veronica proudly showing him the new wall-papers and kindred triumphs of feminine ambition. I was thinking it a rather singular inversion of the value of things, that these should have precedence of the beauties of the garden, when the charitable explanation occurred to me that possibly these were being reserved for me, their real parent, to exhibit. But I was soon disabused of that idea; for, when the Poet's admiration of the mural decorations was exhausted, and we at length all passed into the open air, her primary anxiety was to obtain his approval of three important works that had been executed in his absence, but at his special bidding, and under her sole supervision. You may think that even the self-complacency of ownership could find little to say concerning the carving on a stone mullion of one of the drawing-room windows of the date when our little Manor-house was enlarged, but he did not fail to compliment her warmly on the judicious selection of the precise spot on which to record the figures; and Lamia and I played amiable chorus to the chief actor in the glowing panegyric. A more ambitious work had been the construction

of a flight of brick steps leading from the tennis-ground to the copse kitchen-garden, which, you doubtless remember, lies behind and below it, whereby access from the former to the latter, which had hitherto been circuitous, can now be obtained direct. Veronica apologised for not having been able to procure old bricks with which to execute the work, and was evidently conscious that their new aspect was somewhat of an affront to the ancientness of our abode. But the Poet protested that time and our moist climate would soon cure them of their only fault. For the rest, I do not think the most sumptuous monuments of Imperial Rome, whose ruins he had recently been contemplating, ever evoked more interest or elicited more enthusiastic comment, in the heyday of their splendour. Veronica reserved to the last a visit, indeed I should say a pilgrimage, so solemn was the journey, to the slab and inscription newly placed over the front door, the erection of which, necessitating for the moment a rather ruthless treatment of some of the best clambering roses to which I had with pain consented, was due to the classical tastes of the Poet. The local stone-mason who had been entrusted with this particular work, under Veronica's control, had privately expressed

to me his admiration of her practical talents, mingled with some bewilderment at her precision ; and we now, in turn, admired not only the tasteful choice of the lettering, but the exceeding skill with which a couple of lines from Virgil had been got, without any sacrifice of clearness and legibility, into so narrow a space. The lines are addressed by Evander to Æneas, when the Trojan wanderer has his first glimpse of primitive Rome and the rude wattle huts of the Palatine.

Aude, hospes, contemnere opes, et te quoque dignum
Finge deo ; rebusque veni non asper egenis.

‘ Will you kindly translate for my benefit?’ said Lamia ; ‘ for, as you come almost straight from the Cave of Cacus, your rendering will have classical authority.’

‘ To tell the truth,’ said the Poet, ‘ I have never thought of the meaning of the lines save in their original tongue ; and translating Virgil is perilously like straining the bow of Ulysses. But, if you will be indulgent to a spontaneous attempt, I should say that the English of the lines, at least in their application here, would be, “ Have the courage, dear guest, to disdain ostentation, and with godlike indulgence approach our unpretentious dwelling.” ’

‘Really!’ said Lamia. ‘If you had ransacked the whole body of the classics—the *corpus poetarum*, do you not call it?—I do not think you could find a more inappropriate passage. I will not say your dwelling is either ostentatious or pretentious; indeed it is, most dexterously, neither one nor the other. But I have been thumbing the Latin dictionary; and, though I recognise the skill with which you have given a convenient, and perhaps not wholly inaccurate, signification to *opes* and to *egenis*, I can scarcely think the *tecta pauperis Evandri*, the really humble abode of Evander, and Veronica’s fine-art wall-papers, have much in common.’

This courageous criticism had at any rate the happy result of enabling us to turn away from the inscription, and to seat ourselves under the weeping lime which, though planted but six years ago, already promises to unfold this summer a wide-spreading canopy of leaves.

‘Everything, my dear Lamia,’ said the Poet, when we were once seated, ‘is relative,—with the exception of your charming self, who are sometimes perhaps too absolute. Contrasted with the Halls of Dido, or even with the Palace of Latinus, which Æneas had lately quitted, the abode of Evander,

though I daresay commodious enough in its primitive fashion, must have been wanting in many things, and have appeared to him, fresh from Carthaginian splendours, lowly indeed ; and, though the friends who are good enough to visit the Garden that we Love are not invited to sleep on a couch of leaves, or to accept for coverlet the hide of a Libyan bear, you have only to compare the simple refinement which Veronica has contrived, at trifling cost, to impart to our home, with the prevailing magnificence of residences, both urban and rural, to which you are no stranger, to convince yourself that, even if I had roundly rendered *rebusque veni non asper egenis*, "do not look with disdain on our humble abode," the inscription would still be not altogether out of place. Comfort is not splendour, and refinement is not ostentation ; and splendour and ostentation are now so general, that I think it does require a little courage to live without them.'

Lamia looked, I thought, as though she considered the defence of the quotation ingenious rather than conclusive, for it requires a classical education, which had not been among her many advantages, to appreciate the charm there is in the application of a passage written a couple of

thousand years ago in another tongue to our present condition. But she forbore, with proper tact, from pressing her objection further, and diverted the argument by asking :

‘Have you not got another of those poems to recite to us, which you generally bring with you on your return from abroad, so expressive of the love you bear your native land?’

‘I am afraid, Lamia, I have not ; for the Channel was so smooth, and the air so genial, that I could not on this occasion exclaim,

My northern blood exults to face
The rapture of this rough embrace,
Glowing in every vein to feel
The cordial caress of steel
From spear-blue air and sword-blue sea,
Armour of England’s liberty.

The air and the sea were both blue, but it was the blueness as of the Mediterranean, and I seemed still to be pursuing my journey through Southern waters.’

‘Then,’ said Veronica, ‘recite to us instead the sonnet you sent me from Careggi, when you were staying with those dear friends of ours, who, I believe, would gladly have us with them all the year round, and to which you prefixed the title

"A Dream of England." Do you remember it?'

'Yes, I think so,' he replied, 'for it was written so recently.

Here, where the vine and fig bask hand in hand,
And the hot lizard lies along the wall,
Blinded I shrink where cypress shadows fall,
And gaze upon the far-off mountains bland :
Then down the dusty track Lorenzo planned
Watch the slow oxen oscillating crawl
Sleek in the sultry glare, and feel withal
Half alien still in a familiar land.
But when from out the stone-pine slopes that rise
In the clear ether, black against the blue,
The cuckoo suddenly calls, I close mine eyes
In visionary rapture, think of you,
Hear the home-music of your Kentish skies,
And dream that I am drenched with English dew.

'But I hope,' he went on, 'you will not infer from these lines, the sincere utterance of the moment, that I wish to establish a contrast, far less a conflict, between the beauty of Italy and the beauty of England. I can never say how grateful I am for both, nor can I ever look on them as competitors with each other. One naturally reserves one supreme tenderness for the country of one's birth,—

For where, beneath one's parent sky,
Our dear ones live, our dead ones lie.

But Italy is the other native land of every educated mind, the foster-parent of every sensitive soul.'

'Do you think,' I asked, 'you would be content to live there altogether?'

'I should,' said Lamia.

'And so should I,' chimed in Veronica.

'You think you would,' I said, 'because you once did so. But, were you suddenly to find yourself transferred to a Tuscan villa, you would miss many things which later and longer residence in England has accustomed you to regard as among the indispensable conditions of an orderly existence. Italian domestics are a singularly attractive class, friendly without being familiar, devoted yet not obtrusive, interested in all that interests their *padrone*, ready to lend a hand at any moment to any kind of work, as cheerful as their grasshoppers, as patient as their oxen. But they evade rather than resent discipline, and have an incurable aversion to detail, to finish, and to perfection. About Italian households, as about Italian scenery, there is a negligent grandeur which in our time we have found very attractive, but which is wholly incompatible with certain ideals we have since

insensibly embraced. My dear Veronica, in an Italian home, "O to possess such lustre and then lack!" would soon describe the condition of your cherished sideboards, and your beloved urns would shortly be bright no more, and fade into the light of common day.'

'I would burnish them myself,' said Veronica.

'And I would help you,' added Lamia.

'For a time perhaps,' said the Poet, 'and by way of setting a good example, which would assuredly not be followed. Think, too, of your Italian garden, which looks very charming when it belongs to somebody else, and you pay it a casual visit at a favourable season of the year. Italian gardens, like other things Italian, have their supreme moments of beauty, thanks to the luxuriant fertility of nature. But they fade as quickly as they bloom, and we should all have to alter completely our way of looking at things, in order to reconcile ourselves to their periods of aridity and bareness, and to the negligent untidiness which an Italian gardener could never be brought to correct, since he never could be taught to perceive it. But indeed, to carry one's English ideas of neatness, and one's craving for perfection in detail, to Italy, would be the greatest of mistakes, just as the *pococurante* spirit of

Italian housekeeping and gardening would mar an English home. Let us be grateful that Italy is within our reach, not to dwell in, but to visit ; so that, every year, if possible, we may fill our eyes anew with the vision of its transcendent loveliness. But, fresh from it as I am, I gazed this afternoon, as I was borne swiftly homeward, on our fresh green English copses, on our English pastures with their grazing flocks and skipping lambs, our English hamlets nestling in untrimmed trees, our English hedgerows and lavish wild-flowers, our village churches towering over red-roofed cottages ; and once more, if I may be forgiven for saying so, I blessed Heaven for my British birth, and for the happy fate that has assigned to me an English Manor-house.'

'Which I trust,' said Veronica, 'we shall never have to quit ;' and, had Lamia and I not been present, I think she would have added, 'for I could be happy anywhere with you.'

'As the Manor-house in question does not belong to me,' said Lamia, 'I may speak with more independence. Life in Italy seems to me a larger life than life in England, a life less burdened, as indeed you grant, with anxiety about little things, about the punctuality of the dinner-bell,

the polish of the furniture, the weedlessness of the garden paths. One accomplishes less there, but one worries less.'

'I should worry wherever I was,' said Veronica, with impulsive frankness, 'so long as things were not as they ought to be ; and I think I could introduce a reasonable amount of method, and even of furniture polish, into a transalpine *palazzo*.'

'I am sure,' said the Poet, 'you would make your house a model of grace, refinement, and decorum, in whatever latitude it happened to be placed. But I am deeply rooted in my native land, and could not without a pang be permanently transplanted from it. If this should seem to you and Lamia an exaggerated sentiment, it is, if you will forgive me for saying so, because you are women, not men, and quite naturally, do not feel, in ordinary times at least, the impulses of patriotism as strongly as men do. Were England in danger, I am sure you would then not dream of quitting it, but would manifest on its behalf the feminine devotion that is never fully evoked save for those who are in sore need of it. As it is, England seems so strong, so self-sufficing, as to require no one's assistance, no one's sympathy ; and, in passing the remainder of your days in vineyards

and orange-groves, you would not feel you had abandoned any duty, or deserted anything that could not do without you. But men, manly men at least, are differently constituted, and I should be unable to suppress disdain for an Englishman who, however enamoured of all that Italy can give, and however frequent a visitor to its mountains and its monuments, altogether abandoned, without some supreme excuse, his share in the splendid inheritance of England's loveliness and England's greatness. To be perpetually talking of one's country is an error of taste, as it would be to be perpetually talking of one's mother, or of one's wife. But there are occasions when it is becoming to feel their value and their worth with some intensity ; and a return to them after long absence naturally sharpens the affections, and sometimes, as Lamia has been good enough to remember, stimulates the imagination.'

'But,' said Veronica, 'if one does not live in Italy altogether, it is so difficult to be there at the right times and seasons ; for, having one's home in England, who would quit it from May to October ? Yet Italy is not the Italy of one's dreams or one's desires, in Winter.'

'Precisely,' said Lamia. 'That is my difficulty

also. It is not till England gets endurable that Italy becomes enchanting ; not until you can pass your mornings with comfort in the company of marble statues, and your afternoons with satisfaction and safety in mediæval churches, that you can, as now, be sitting on an English lawn, under a wide-spreading lime. It never rains but it pours ; and all the nice things come together, so that one must perforce go without half of them.'

'Then comfort yourself, Lamia,' I ventured to remark, 'with what Hesiod says so shrewdly, that half is greater than the whole.'

'I fear I cannot console myself,' she replied, 'with that optimistic paradox. I should like Tuscan figs to ripen in December, Umbrian grapes to hang in purple clusters through February and March, and fire-flies to illuminate New Year nights. Then, when you wrote to me that the swallows were nesting under the beams of your cart-shed, that the May-fly was flitting along your trout-stream, and that your spring garden was in the very zenith of its unrivalled beauty, then, but not till then, would I leave the Apennines behind, which, in a conveniently regulated world, would avail themselves of my absence to inflict on Italy whatever amount

of snow and nipping weather may be indispensable even to that lovely land.'

'Meanwhile, Lamia,' said the Poet, 'and until Providence changes its arrangements, I think much enchantment can be derived from Italy as it is, and from England as it is. It is a mistake to suppose that an Italian Spring is not, as a rule, as capricious as an English one; but I need hardly say to you, of all people, that caprice is not wholly unattractive. I have just been in Italy for six weeks, and we had sunshine and storm, heat and cold, days of perfect serenity, and days of bewildering instability of temper. But do not be irritated with me if I say that I enjoyed every moment of it. People who clamour for perpetual summer would soon weary of it, if their prayer were granted. Indeed I think there is only one form of weather against which it would be pardonable to protest, and that is weather of uniformly cloudless skies.'

'There speaks the gardener and the Englishman at once,' said Lamia. 'He is defending his native land, and putting in a plea for his beloved flowers, at one and the same time. A witty Frenchman once defined patriotism as *égoïsme à trente millions*,—that then being the population of France; and I believe the Poet's patriotism, if carefully analysed,

would resolve itself into an egotistic concern for the Garden that we Love, and for the climate that best develops its beauty, combined with a yet more selfish partiality for the natural scenery and the manly exploits that furnish the most congenial subjects to his particular Muse.'

'How *can* you say that, Lamia?' exclaimed Veronica. 'He has written quite as much of Italy as of England; indeed, I think, almost more.'

'Yes, but that was before he knew *you*; and in those days perhaps he would have given a different reply to the question whether he could live contentedly in Italy all the year round. It is you, Veronica, who have made him insular, by caging him in this agreeable garden; and, as now he sings only of misselthrushes and windflowers, he vows there is nothing like England.'

'Quite true, my dear Lamia,' the Poet broke in. 'But we must all live somewhere; and one naturally ends by loving that best which one sees the oftenest, and with which one is most familiar. You asked me just now if I had not brought home with me some verses suggested by my return, and I was obliged to confess I had not. But to show how insular, as you say, I have become, in consequence of Veronica's malefic influence, I will, if

you care to hear them, repeat some lines on a very old theme of mine, our English Spring, composed in the very heart of the Campagna and within sight of the Alban Mount.'

We all assumed that attitude of attention which from time immemorial has been expected by the most indifferent of poets from the most careless of audiences, and remained religiously mute during the recitation of

THE PASSING OF SPRING

I

SPRING came out of the woodland chase,
With her violet eyes and her primrose face,
With an iris scarf for her sole apparel,
And a voice as blithe as a blackbird's carol.

II

As she flitted by garth and slipped through glade,
Her light limbs winnowed the wind, and made
The gold of the pollened palm to float
On her budding bosom and dimpled throat.

III

Then, brushing the nut-sweet gorse, she sped
Where the runnel lisps in its reedy bed,
O'er shepherded pasture and crested fallow,
And buskined her thigh with strips of sallow.

IV

By the marigold marsh she paused to twist
The gold-green coils round her blue-veined wrist,
And out of the water-bed scooped the cresses,
And frolicked them round her braidless tresses.

V

She passed by the hazel dell, and lifted
The coverlet fern where the snow had drifted,
To see if it there still lingered on,
Then shook the catkins, and laughed, "'Tis gone !'

VI

Through the crimson tips of the wintry brake
She peeped, and shouted, 'Awake ! Awake !'
And over the hill and down the hollow
She called, 'I have come. So follow, follow !'

VII

Then the windflower looked through the crumbling mould,
And the celandine opened its eyes of gold,
And the primrose sallied from chestnut shade,
And carried the common and stormed the glade.

VIII

In sheltered orchard and windy heath
The dauntless daffodils slipped their sheath,
And, glittering close in clump and cluster,
Dared norland tempests to blow and bluster.

IX

Round crouching cottage and soaring castle
The larch unravelled its bright-green tassel ;
In scrub and hedgerow the blackthorn flowered,
And laughed at the May for a lagging coward.

X

Then, tenderly ringing old Winter's knell,
The hyacinth swung its soundless bell,
And over and under and through and through
The copses there shimmered a sea of blue.

XI

Like a sunny shadow of cloudlet fleeting,
Spring skimmed the pastures where lambs were bleating ;
Along with them gambolled by bole and mound,
And raced and chased with them round and round.

XII

To the cuckoo she called, ' Why lag you now ?
The woodpecker nests in the rotten bough ;
The song-thrush pipes to his brooding mate,
And the thistlefinch pairs : you alone are late.'

XIII

Then over the seasonless sea he came,
And jocundly answered her, name for name,
And, falsely flitting from copse to cover,
Made musical mock of the jilted lover.

XIV

But with him there came the faithful bird
That lives with the stars, and is nightly heard
When the husht babe dimples the mother's breast,
And Spring said, sighing, 'I love *you* best.

XV

'For sweet is the sorrow that sobs in song
When Love is stronger than Death is strong,
And the vanished Past a more living thing
Than the fleeting voice and the fickle wing.'

XVI

Then the meadows grew golden, the lawns grew white,
And the poet-lark sang himself out of sight ;
And English maidens and English lanes
Were serenaded by endless strains.

XVII

The hawthorn put on her bridal veil,
And milk splashed foaming in pan and pail ;
The swain and his sweetening met and kissed,
And the air and the sky were amethyst.

XVIII

'Now scythes are whetted and roses blow,'
Spring, carolling, said ; 'It is time to go.'
And though we called to her, 'Stay ! O stay !'
She smiled through a rainbow, and passed away.

'*Cælum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt,*' I murmured, when the recitation came to a close. 'You are indeed an Englishman, my dear Poet, to write like that, with the ruins of the Roman Empire lying around you. But, after all, Spring is everywhere the same; and I cannot blame you for writing of her as you best know her, when she comes a tardy visitant to our English shore. Come now, and let me show you what she is doing for you in an English garden.'

It may have been an hour later that I heard Veronica calling somewhat impatiently to Lamia, who at length emerged from the leafiest and dampest part of the shrubbery.

'How naughty of you! Do come in! You know what the doctor said. There! you are coughing. I knew it would be so.'

Poor Lamia opened wide her arms, as though she would embrace the air from which she was thus bidden to tear herself away.

'I love the twilight,' she exclaimed, 'the twilight and the coming of the stars. I love the wet grass, the darkening trees, and the moist silence that is waiting for the nightingales. I think, *on this occasion*, I might be allowed to



‘WET GRASS AND DARKENING TREES’



Hear the home-music of your Kentish skies,
And dream that I am drenched with English dew.'

The only way of diverting Veronica from her duty that I have ever discovered, is to quote a certain person's verses. She brought out a knitted shawl and muffled Lamia in its folds; protesting, at the same time, that it was the height of imprudence for her to linger yet longer in the twilight chill.

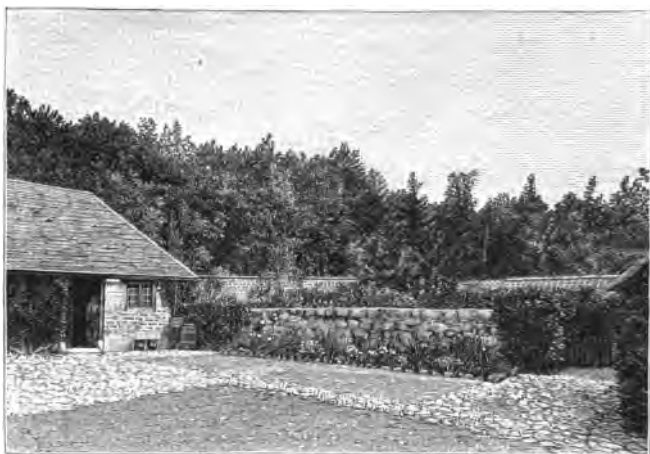
'What *can* it matter?' said Lamia. 'I should be well content to imitate the Spring so recently described to us.'

'In what respect?' asked the Poet.

Lamia lifted the shawl from off her shoulders, and arched it with ineffable grace over her fair young head.

'Can you be in any doubt?' she asked. 'I should be well content to imitate her when

She smiled through a rainbow, and passed away.'



IN VERONICA'S GARDEN

May 24th.

SUSPECTING that, after a six weeks' separation, Veronica and the Poet, though always protesting we can never be too much with them, might not be sorry if we absented ourselves from their felicity awhile, Lamia and I, going our separate ways, accepted offers of hospitality elsewhere. It so happened that one of my visits was paid to a place of much repute, where ample wealth, and what is commonly esteemed taste, have worked together to produce a most elaborate effect. Nowhere are

there statelier terraces, nowhere wider stretches of lawn, nowhere more ornamental or better-grown trees and shrubs of every sort that will prosper in temperate latitudes. Where natural conditions refuse to yield them sufficient warmth or sustenance, conservatory and hothouse provide them with adequate shelter, and you may pass, in a moment, from the conifers of the Rocky Mountains to the date-bearing palms of the tropics. There are avenues, archways, and vistas of classic formality, there are mossy, winding ways, precipitous rock-gardens, labyrinths of close-clipped yews, miniature lakes, whereon are white-sailed swans,

Tacking without or strain or stress,
And steered but by their loveliness;

and, beyond, wider and wilder expanses of weedless water bordered by reedmace and bulrush, where wild-duck nest and dabchicks breed. Lamia, in her most magnificent moods, could neither ask for nor conceive anything more ambitious and complete.

I suppose it is what, trying to turn the tables on me, she designates my low tastes, that preclude me from appreciating as I should this affluent collocation of everything that can surround a princely

English abode. It may be that I cannot rise to the height of so great an argument, and that some smallness in my own nature prevents me from expanding in admiration and sympathy for this grand and costly horticulture. For one flower you may see in the Garden that I Love, there are ten thousand here ; and I confess with candour, and without a blush, that some of them are finer specimens of their sort than any I can grow. Moreover, there are many shrubs and some plants, though I think no herbaceous ones worth fostering, not to be found in Veronica's Garden at all. But just as, were a woman to go to some festive gathering in a simple cotton gown, while every other fair guest was arrayed in delicate muslin or in dainty silk, she would in general estimation be outshone, so when the flowers that are familiar to us in cottage enclosures are introduced into the company of semi-exotics and rare sub-tropical blossoms, they are, it is true, no less beautiful than before, but who will say the same impression is produced? I may retain my preference for them even there, and wish that their prouder and more pretentious companions were away ; but what is this but to confess that the result we are asked to admire does not satisfy us? If we have any true

sense of nature or of art, we feel there is incongruity somewhere; and, while those who are destitute of that instinct admire the splendour, the costliness, the rarity of it all, they in reality are offering conventional tribute to pomp and power, not simple, honest homage to loveliness and beauty.

I was never more confirmed in the feeling expressed by the maxim, in the Second Georgic,

*Laudato ingentia rura,
Exiguum colito,*

than when, on returning to-day to Veronica's Garden, I approached it from the Park, and along the winding lime avenue of, I hope you remember, my own planting. I observed, with parental satisfaction, that the trees, somewhat laggard and reluctant in their growth for a year or two after they were first put in, are now thriving so heartily that Veronica has already told me some of the lower boughs must be lopped, or they will scratch the carriage panels of the more dazzling of our neighbours who occasionally honour us with a visit. Some of the trees, I perceive, are at length going to flower, so that, when July arrives, the warm still nights will be

laden with their luscious fragrance. But when I reached the white rustic gate, which is painted afresh, punctually as every Spring comes round, I said to myself, with all the sincerity of a spontaneous exclamation, that I had never before seen what lay before me looking to such advantage. On either side of the orchard-drive, the grass had, in my absence, grown high and lush, and over it rose the graceful stems and pearl-white umbels of the wild cow-parsnip, which as children we used to call kex, and which the Poet tells me I may continue to do, since it is a Shakespearean designation. Out of this rich jungle of grass rose shapely pine and fir, the Scotch, the Silver, the Nordmann, the Lawson, all with their fresh tips of golden green, and dotted among them shone the bright growth of the newly-raimented beeches. To the right was a scarlet thorn, just opening its brilliant flowers ; to the left, a Quince, surely the most beautiful of all flowering shrubs, every long green curving branch starred with large single delicate pink-and-white blossoms. Bear with me if I do not describe it adequately ; for, in truth, I think the Poet himself could not do so. If I spoke of it as a shower, or rather a fountain, of bloom, a fountain whose delicate dome curves and falls, but

fades and fails not, should I be exaggerating, or doing that which the Poet tells me we should never do, pressing the power of language too far, and striving to make words serve more than their large but withal limited purpose? Not far behind it is a clump of golden elder, which in Veronica's Garden keeps its colour, though I have heard complaints of its going back to green elsewhere; and nearer to it still is a group of Spanish broom, a marvel of whiteness. The sugar maples, I gladly observe, have made long shoots or whips; but they reserve their beauty for the Autumn, as does the liquidambar, which has likewise got over its antipathy to transplantation, and now gives promise of yearly adding to its stature. The *Pyrus malus*, which I have no wish to belittle, would have held my regard longer, had it not been that, after the Quince, not even it can claim more than a secondary place. I smiled to notice that some of the late tulips, which I had experimentally committed to the rough ground and tangled grass, and which Veronica scornfully foretold I should never see again, peeped through, here and there; and she is so seldom a mistaken prophetess, I must not omit to call her attention to them. But what most

arrested my gaze, and filled me with the deepest delight, was the foliage of our patriarchal Oak. Never before had I seen it in such lavish leaf. When the tennis-ground was made, a considerable amount of earth was removed, as I have elsewhere recorded, from the area under which live its wide-spreading roots ; and Veronica was disposed to think I had thereby inflicted on it irreparable damage. Its appearance to-day is the best answer to that ill-founded fear ; for though its trunk must have felt the suns and have received the rains of a thousand years, it is the youngest-looking thing within sight, and its newly-woven canopy is so dense that it conceals from view what rotten branches I begged to be allowed to spare, knowing they alone will make the woodpecker and the tree-creeper faithful to the spot. One may do irreparable mischief to bird life by waging too relentless a war upon dying boughs, and also, as I have discovered, by keeping fruit-trees, in obedience to superior command, free from moss and lichen. The gold-crested wrens used to flit and flicker about the espalier pear-trees in the walled kitchen-garden, heeding me no more than if I were one of themselves. In an evil hour, for the supposed good of the trees, and

that they might bear more profusely, a weak solution of soft soap and paraffin was applied to them, and they were washed as clean,—well, as certain sideboards I know of. But the gold-crested wrens have deserted them, and their jewelled heads no longer dip and dive among the April blossom. I fear a very varied bird life is incompatible with a disciplined garden ; for, while one bird prefers one sort of tree, and another another, they all love the secure privacy of tangled boughs, and untrimmed, unviolated thickets. Of blackbirds, thrushes, whitethroats, garden-warblers, linnets, blackcaps, spotted fly-catchers, wrynecks, tree-creepers, chiffchaffs, wag-tails, robins, tits, and finches of every kind, we have enough, and perhaps to spare. But the enthusiastic ornithologist would say the list is still not ample enough ; and I should have to defend myself by pointing to healthy shrubs and prosperous flowers, and pleading that a garden, like life itself, is a compromise. All around us sing the nightingales, but into the garden itself they, some years, come but shyly. Lamia, wishing, I suppose, to ingratiate herself with the Poet, says it is because they are jealous. But the real cause of their remaining

on our outskirts is that we are too kempt, too tidy. I am afraid, moreover, we are getting more kempt and more tidy. That passion for faultlessness that presides within-doors seems to be invading the garden more and more. Indeed, it diverts me to observe how the Poet is succumbing to it in more directions than one, and is perpetually endeavouring to infect me with the like foible. An ill-kept garden is, no doubt, an illogical and unseemly appendage to a well-kept house. Only where is one to stop? Is there to be a weed nowhere, and are the trees and shrubs in none of the borders to have a will and way of their own? I must raise this point with him; for, truth to tell, I half suspect he too is growing too kempt and tidy, and what some would call too highly finished, in his verse also; and, to my poor thinking, that is a consummation not to be wished. I must show him a passage I came across, the other day, in a Latin eulogy of Buffon by the saintly and refined Fénélon, in which the graceful preacher says, '*Politiori stilo quam præstitit aurea negligentia!*'

It was while standing under the majestic curtain of the immemorial oak that I fell into this vein of reflection. But, in sooth, the scene was so lovely,

I was kept spellbound by it. They all laugh at me when I produce my evidence for the belief I have not the slightest intention of abandoning, that it was under this particular oak Alfred the Great held his Witan 'at the Hundred-Tree of Swinbeorh,' where he made provision for the children of his brother Ethelred. But no one could quarrel with me for being arrested by the fitful glimpses of the garden I now obtained through its curving branches, and still more by the irregularly-dotted groups of flowers, both wild and cultivated, that grew in full beauty under its protecting shade. The world contains no fairer sight than breadths of bluebells under a newly-burgeoned forest-tree ; and, if the tree be nigh to some human dwelling, and on the fringe of a comely garden, the effect is magical to the sensitive gaze. Here there were groups of bluebells, or wild hyacinths rather, blue, pink, and white. Here were tufts of the Poet's Narcissus, little colonies of columbine, white, purple, and yellow ; here were the yet green spears of the daffodil-leaves whose golden flowers had passed away ; and these gay lilliputian denizens of May seemed to live, and breathe, and have their being, under the paternal protection of the colossal patriarch that

stooped over them so tenderly. The most far-reaching of its branches stretched athwart an oval bed of rhododendrons, which also seemed benefited rather than hurt by its kindly patronage.

Ergo non hyemes illam, non flabra, neque imbres
Convellunt : immota manet, multosque per annos
Multa virum volvens durando sæcula vincit.

There is no storm that ever blew against English shores that could uproot or gravely injure this splendid survivor of a vanished wealden forest. But, if it could, and if it did, the Garden that I Love would lose its chiefest ornament, and I should discourse of it no more. The old Oak, the old Manor-house, these are the two constituents of its beauty no one living called into existence ; and, compared with them and their presiding influence, all I myself have done is hardly worth remembering. I potter, as Lamia says, among my tulips, my roses, and my lilies, for one has fallen into a way of doing so ; and for what one helps to create, self-complacency cannot but feel a constantly-recurring interest. But my real reverence is reserved for those two stately bequests from the Past. More and more I find myself enamoured of ancientness, its serenity, its established wisdom, its readiness to protect and

foster the Present, its indulgent but not too sanguine outlook towards the Future, its faithful association with many yesterdays, its bond of hope with all to-morrows, its bland and calm contemplation of the ephemeral fret, fume, and turmoil of to-day.

Passing out at length from its chequered shade, I perceived that the tulips in the formal beds had now all shed their petals, and their crownless stalks had been thoughtfully removed. But the forget-me-not with which they had lately consorted was still in the zenith of its amethystine bloom ; and, in the mixed beds and borders, the gorgeous Oriental poppies had begun their truly imperial reign. Yellow daylilies, dark-red valerian, and snow-white columbines clustered round them, in reality more beautiful than they, but more lowly, and therefore paying them the homage of humble contrast. Look in what direction I would, I saw lilac and laburnum and guelder-rose, golden berberis and silvery Japanese maples, dazzling rhododendrons, delicate azaleas, and at last—at last!—the first rich red shoots of the tea-roses, daintily sprouting above the purple violas I still give them for companions. The border under the house, which had extorted such flattering eulogiums from Veronica, was now,

I confess, visibly on the wane; but I could turn for more than consolation to Poet's Corner, nigh at hand, where everything wears the brand-new livery of May. I could not have believed that a *Clematis montana* could travel so far, and flower so prodigally, within two years of its being planted, and I can see that in another twelvemonth it will be a snow-white curtain along and above the whole length of the enclosing walls. In this favoured recess, whose construction I once described at length, everything prospers and progresses. No, let me be candid. I have lost my beautiful perennial *Coreopsis grandiflora*, which last year flowered as though it would live for ever, and I likewise miss the large-flowering *Erigeron*, which then remained in bloom for the better part of three months. But their place is more than supplied by the new perennial lupine, which calls itself *Lupinus polyphyllus albus*, and which is, I almost think, the proudest and most perfect-looking thing I have ever seen. It lifts up seven spotlessly white tapering spikes of stately height, all in full flower at once, and ranged, without helping hand, in an absolutely perfect circle, at equal distances from each other; and the green of the graceful leaves is as rich and flawless

as the flowers themselves. Moreover, nothing beyond what I have named has "gone home," despite the late ferocious winter ; and everything is growing as though it inhabited a world where frost and snow are as unknown as in the celestial abodes of Lucretius. Larkspur and phlox, iris and campanula, pæony and globe-thistle, variegated comfrey and glaucous-leaved funkia, all are well on the way to unfolding their beauty ; and we now only need a moist close to May, and a dripping introduction to June, to garland Summer and the Garden that we Love with a profusion of flowers transcending the richest triumphs of the past.

'When you have quite done,' said a voice behind me, 'complacently contemplating the work of your own hands, perhaps you will be able to spare a glance, and even a word, for a visitor who has arrived before you.'

It was Lamia, looking, I must confess, more even than my flowers, the spirit and genius of the 'sweet of the year.'

*'Te, Dea, te fugiunt venti, te nubila cœli,
Adventumque tuum ; tibi suaves dædala tellus
Summittit flores, tibi rident æquora ponti,
Placatumque nitet diffuso lumine cœlum.'*

I could not help murmuring, as I gazed on her.

‘Are you committing to memory,’ she asked, ‘the Latin names of your new flowers, to amaze the groundlings?’

‘No,’ I said, ‘I was only observing in a dead tongue, lest, had I spoken in a living one, you might have resented the compliment, that you have brought May, with all its beauty and bounty, along with you! But where is Veronica?’

‘She has driven over to a sale at some farmhouse or other, where she believes she is sure to pick up a chair, and possibly a clothes-press, of incalculable antiquity, for the proverbial song.’

‘And the Poet?’

‘In a fine frenzy, I conclude, deep in a forest glade, or by the murmuring stream; for, as yet, I have not had sight of him.’

‘You really must come,’ I said, ‘and see the new iris border; for in the course of my rounds I have not yet visited it.’

The stableyard—I daresay the word sounds very unromantic,—has three old stone-walls of rough Kentish rag, against which some uninventive person at some time or another planted the conventional ivy. There is quite enough of it elsewhere, the large Irish ivy especially; so I removed it, with some difficulty, from the wall

facing south, and found myself in possession of the very thing I had long coveted, a rough vertical surface onto and into which sedums, saxifrages, wallflowers, and the like, might be introduced. Then I tore up the rubble pavement in front of it for some distance, and made a couple of miniature terraces, edged and upheld by rough stone-work. Among this last I planted other saxifrages, seeking for none that are rare, but selecting those that are hardy and sure to do, and not by any means disdaining a handsome gift of London Pride from fair, flowery Killarney. The two terraces themselves I dedicated to German, to English, and to Spanish irises, and among them I planted seedling columbines of my own raising, ixias, the Florentine *Bandiere della Toscana*, *Schizostylis*, and two bold groups of orange and tiger lilies. Let me not forget to add that against the rough old gray wall, which is not above four feet high, a *Souvenir de ma Mie*, an *Idéal*, a *Lamarque*, and a *Perle des Jardins*, are beginning to bloom.

‘Well, that *is* beautiful,’ said Lamia, ‘and quite new. I wish that critical person were here, who the other day affirmed the Garden that we Love to be an ignorant garden.’

‘And an ignorant garden, Lamia, in the sense so

used, it will remain to the last, and more than ever now that the Poet has something to say to its aspect. A Garden, to my thinking, is neither a museum nor a laboratory, a place neither for learned collections nor for ingenious experiments. I am deeply grateful both to the collectors and to the experimentalists, and I avail myself to the best of my ability of their useful labours, but only in so far as these subserve the supreme purpose of a garden, which is Beauty. Collecting rare plants, and growing specimen flowers, are something quite different from cultivating a garden. When I am shown so many square feet of Love-in-the-Mist, then a bare patch of soil, then some furlongs of *Salpiglossis*, then more bare soil, and so on, I am disposed to inquire if the flowers are grown for market, and am compelled to observe that the cultivation of them in this fashion is no more difficult than the cultivating of radishes or the sowing of carrots. They bear the same relation to a real garden that the words in the dictionary bear to a beautifully written book. They are the materials out of which a garden may be made, but of themselves they do not constitute a garden. With the exception of the beds of tea-roses and violas, you doubtless observe that I

expect almost every flower, due regard being had to height and colour, to flourish side by side with every other flower. I ask my flowers, the annuals as well as the perennials, not to be too exclusive, nor selfishly to demand a space all to themselves, but rather to be amiably sociable, to consort considerately with their kind, and, if necessary, which it often is in this world, to subordinate something of individual pretensions to the common good.'

'That will do,' said Lamia. 'It was not I who reproached you with ignorance, and you cannot say I have so far contradicted you. But I am sure I very soon shall, if you advance much further along the flowery path of metaphorical moralising you seem this morning disposed to tread. Extol Veronica's Garden as much as you like, and I will be patient. But I know I shall rebel if you attempt to apply its no doubt unequalled charms to the purposes of a moral sermon. I do not feel the smallest interest in the common good, and I shall assuredly not sacrifice to it any individual pretensions I may myself chance to have. Perhaps the safest course will be to tear you away from a congenial but dangerous theme. Let us go into the park.'

That is a proposal to which I always gladly accede at every season of the year ; for, though one perforce dwells for the most part among one's winding shrubberies, one's smooth lawns, one's weedless walks, and one's carefully-tended flowers, one is not so insular as not to be aware that these are insignificant compared with the vast, untrimmed expanse of some undulating ancient chase, whose flora are immemorial oaks, colossal elms, stately beeches, thickly-tasselled sycamores, umbrageous chestnuts, wide-spreading limes, and soaring ash, and where, as you muse and saunter, you insensibly pass from close-nibbled turf to tangled bents and casual breadths of matted bracken. I know nothing, not even storied cathedral nor ruined abbey, that so impresses one with the sense that the Past is around and about one, as does an English Park, whose boles and boughs bear evidence of hoar antiquity. The park that I have come to look on as my own, since I have so long had access to it, and no one, except the Poet, roams in it so frequently, is a perfect specimen of Nature's own woodcraft. There is no English tree known to me—and amongst these I reckon the ilex or evergreen oak, and the Spanish chestnut,—of which it cannot boast a lovely



‘AN ENGLISH LANE’



specimen. You will probably have surmised, from a phrase I have just let fall, that it owes its chief beauty rather to the skill of Nature than to the craft of man. I do not say it has been uncared for, but for hundreds of years it has never been cared for over much. It has been used neither as a mine of wealth, nor as a field for experiment in forestry. Numbers of trees have been left which a thrifty owner would long since have cut down ; and no one studying what is called picturesque effect has interfered with the far happier results of accident, of wind and storm, of growth and self-propagation. On its highest point is a magnificent toll or assemblage of Spanish chestnuts, the girth of whose trunks all but equals that of our wealden oak, and whose huge fantastic branches, seen in the horizontal light of a crimson winter sunset, look like weird ghosts of primitive eld. But at every season of the year they testify silently to the long, slow, sure, incessant labours of time, who, one likes to think, is still ever at work preparing for some distant future an equally majestic past. I will not say how old I believe them to be. But, hard by, there were till lately other trees, evidently much, much younger ; and when these were cut down a little while back, we calculated

from a careful inspection of their inner rings that they could not be less than some two hundred and fifty years of age. Shortly afterwards, I came across an entry in a manuscript appertaining to the estate, recording that many trees had been cut down and sent to London, immediately after the Great Fire early in the reign of Charles II., to serve as timber for the rebuilding of the Capital. Here was curious confirmation of our surmise of the age of trees which had doubtless been planted to take the place of those felled at the date of the Fire; and, as I say, these are mere youngsters and saplings compared with the noble company of gnarled and wrinkled elders that surmount the final summit of the toll.

‘Has it never seemed strange to you,’ said Lamia, ‘that a family which has for hundreds of years owned this timbered chase and that stately mansion’—for it is from the chestnut toll the house is best seen,—‘should not, as far as I have ever heard, have produced one member of its name famous in the field, in the senate, in letters, or indeed in any of those generous avocations that present a pathway to distinction?’

‘I suppose it must so seem,’ I answered, ‘unless one liberates oneself from modern ideas, and con-

ceives a time, indeed many times, when men were not consumed with that personal ambition and that desire to shine which are so passionately entertained to-day, but were content to go on from year to year doing their duty without effort, ostentation, or restlessness, in that sphere of life in which Heaven had been pleased to place them. I believe you are right in thinking that this particular family, though owners here of the land since the Conquest, and perhaps before, have contributed nothing to the more resounding glories of their country. But think how much they must have contributed to its stability, to its quiet happiness, and to its social virtue, within the by no means narrow radius of their individual influence. Their names, it is true, are not great in story, but their tombs and effigies are in the village church, the record of their benevolence is on the village almshouses, the vestiges of their paternal presence are to be traced in many a village parlour. They must have been wise, kindly magistrates, dispensing law, not for pay, but from love of social order, from loyalty to the Crown, and from reverence for the State. Some of them must, at times, have kept the hounds, and have ridden religiously to cover, to greet and be greeted by their lowlier

neighbours. They coveted no glory, and sought no fame, afar. They remained at home, cultivating the domestic virtues, punctual at prayer, occupied with the offices of local charity, fearing God, and honouring the King. As far as I can make out, this is the sum total of their deeds ; for they had not even that least noble of all ambitions, which consists in saving the fortunes of an imperilled house by the annexation of an opulent heiress.'

'And therefore,' said Lamia, 'their estate is in the market, and they are about to pass away from the land. Verily, virtue is its own punishment.'

'The fittest survive,' I answered sadly, and not heeding her exasperating paradox. 'But let us never forget that the fittest are not necessarily the best, unless we blasphemously identify Morality with Fate. The strong or the shrewd survive ; and, in the progressive struggle for existence, Nature is pitiless to homely virtues and the uncombative sanctities of the hearth.'

'You are much too moral for me this morning,' she observed. 'I want to enjoy the bounty of May without any reflections on the conduct of man and its consequences. I wish the Poet were here, that he might sing to me, as—hark!

all the birds are singing, notes of unadulterated joy.

Again the cuckoo called ; again
The merle and mavis shook their throats ;
The torrent rambled down the glen,
The ringdove cooed in sylvan cotes.

The hawthorn moved not, but still kept
As fixedly white as far cascade ;
The russet squirrel frisked and leapt
From breadth of sun to breadth of shade.

What more do you want?' she went on. 'Why put doubtful and sometimes distressful meaning into the clear, childlike, and unharassed face of Spring? Let us join in her chorus of jubilation, or be silent.'

I felt that, for once, she had rightly reproved me ; and, breaking a long branch of white hawthorn in densest bloom, I passed it into her hand. She balanced it on her shoulder as a woodlander does his axe when returning homeward from his work, and I thought, and frankly told her, she herself was May. We were in that portion of the park where the hawthorns are oldest and largest ; and I remembered, with a touch of self-complacency, that I had saved the finest of them from splitting

in twain, as is rather the habit with ancient thorns, not only by placing timber props under their heaviest and most imperilled branches, but by drawing and keeping their gaping boles together with iron bars and bolts. Once the weather gets into the yawning trunk, its falling asunder is only a question of time, and then the beauty of the tree is gone for ever; and against this danger I had timely provided.

‘Yes, you did a good deed there,’ said my companion; ‘for he who saves an ancient tree does better even than he who plants a new one. Even I will moralise with you to that extent. And then I know, by a hundred indications in his verse, that the Poet has composed many of his verses here, where,

As lush as in an English chase,
The hawthorn, guessed by its perfume,
With folds on folds of snowy lace
Blindfolded all its leaves with bloom.

See,’ she went on, ‘that is a true description, for you cannot discern a leaf for all this network of blossom. But what is that?’

She pointed to a dip in the park, where stood some of its most soaring and spreading timber, and I looked in the direction she indicated.

‘It is a fallen elm,’ I said.

‘Yes, and it is *the* elm, the one where I know he has so often made a tryst with the Muse.’

We walked toward the spot, and found it was only too true that the noblest of all the elms lay prone on the ground, which, as it fell, it had ploughed and scored and dented with its mighty limbs. Unlike men, trees look bigger when they have fallen than when they stood erect ; and we both exclaimed, at one and the same time, we had never imagined its trunk to be so huge, its boughs so colossal, or its branches so many and so spreading. It was only with my assistance that Lamia could get on to the upper surface of the now horizontal trunk ; and, while she did so at one end, lambs were frisking on it at the other, some of them nibbling at the fresh green shoots.

‘Come away,’ she exclaimed, leaping from the rough and rounded platform to which I had raised her, ‘or you will be moralising afresh. But the Poet *will* be sorry.’

On reaching home we found the spring-cart standing at the door, with a load of the most curious medley of furniture on which I had ever set my eyes ; and, had I not known Veronica’s tastes, and likewise been forewarned by what Lamia

had told me, I should have thought it was part of a gipsy encampment, or of what rustic folk call a Michaelmas flitting. Veronica was there, but was much too occupied in instructing the Poet how to assist the groom in lifting down the precious load, and laying the various articles on the grass, to take any note of our presence.

‘It is not the Fifth of November, is it?’ said Lamia, ‘so why this preparation for a bonfire?’

The Poet moved about with a gravity worthy of the occasion ; but I could see that he even less than I had any accurate idea of what would be the final outcome of his functions. Whenever Veronica attends a sale in the neighbourhood, and brings home with her the battered trophies of a long day's patient attendance, we are invariably lost in irreverent wonder, and indulge in humorous speculations not only as to how much she has given for them, but what purpose she will put them to. We ought by this time to be cured of our profanity, for, as the proverb says, ‘they laugh best who laugh last,’ and I must honestly confess I have never known one of her purchases, however ramshackle, decrepit, or unavailable it might seem, not become in due course a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. I think the least reverential of us on

these occasions is the Poet himself. But I observe that as soon as ever the battered remnants of a Jacobean linen-press, which has been mouldering in some farmhouse for generations, and which really seems, as Lamia just now suggested, fit fuel for Guy Fawkes's Day, have been magically transformed by the purchaser, with the help of the village carpenter, into an 'aesthetic' chest of drawers, with antique brass handles and key escutcheons, the Poet takes good care to appropriate it to his own use, and then points out to every one that comes its picturesque club feet, its ancient handiwork, now patched and perfected so that the most skilled cannot detect the new from the old, and descants on the seven-and-sixpence originally given for it, as though the merit of the bargain were his own. One of his proudest possessions is a commodious arm-chair, with cane-work sides and back and morocco-covered cushions, which Veronica bought for even less than a song at an auction held at a neighbouring Rectory. It is evident enough now to the commonest observer that generations of venerable country clergymen must have pondered their sermons in its arms, for it has been refurbished, repolished, recastered, and recushioned, while losing little or nothing of its

grave look of ancientness ; and now, in the opinion of us all, for we are the most servile and sycophantic of converts, it would fetch at least five guineas in market overt.

I gather, from the public prints, that a certain compassion, not to say disdain, is entertained in these days by a good many persons for the woman that is spiritless enough to cultivate the domestic virtues. For my part, I still think, as a very wise man thought more than two thousand years ago, that the price of her is far above rubies, that the heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil, that she will do him good and not evil all the days of his life, that she perceiveth her merchandise is good, and that it is no fault of hers if her husband is not known in the gates, and doth not sit among the elders of the land.

Be this as it may, Veronica has contrived, by dint of sedulously attending rustic auctions, and keeping touch with out-of-the-way country dealers in bric-à-brac, to make the interior of her home the envy of many persons who visit it. We inherited, like the rest of the world a few years back, as did also the Poet, a quantity of household furniture once deemed exceedingly handsome,

because in its time it cost no little money. My blessing on our mothers and grandmothers for many good things! But the dear old ladies, with their passion for solid mahogany bedsteads, for walnut-framed chairs, for sideboards of ghastly splendour, for dazzling console-tables, and for devotional chairs encased in laborious wool-work, went sadly astray, or at least we think so, in matters of taste; and I doubt if more than just one rocking-chair, to which the Poet, for some reason or other, seems to cling, of all the furniture treasures they bequeathed us, is now to be seen under Veronica's roof. By degrees she has exchanged them, directly or indirectly, for real old Sheraton and Chippendale; and I am by no means sure that, with her curious talent for barter, and indeed for all things practical, she has not put money into her purse by the various transactions in which she has so long been engaged.

'And to think,' said the Poet to me the other day, 'of people supposing there is anything incompatible in a woman rising while it is yet night and giving meat to her household, and in her being at the same time thoroughly at home in the speech and literature of more than one foreign tongue, and sufficiently familiar for the purposes of serious

converse with the philosophies of yesterday and the speculations of to-day. I know some one who is not a Master of Arts, and who will never adorn a public platform. But how dearly I should like to hear her, when some day she has done satisfying herself that the new pots of strawberry jam have been duly covered with rounds of white paper steeped in brandy, quietly correcting the historical inaccuracies, or completing the imperfectly-remembered quotations, of the erudite female progressists who do not know huckaback from sheeting, and could not make you a linseed poultice to save your life.'

Naturally the Poet speaks on this subject with some little partiality. But I am bound to say he is substantially as just in these remarks as he is when applying the Biblical words, 'She looketh well to the ways of her household,' and loves to add from the same source, 'She shall be praised.'

'We have now seen quite enough of this magnificent furniture,' observed Lamia, 'and if I may be allowed to say it without profanity, of the garden also; and I am sure we should all like some tea. We have not yet had it, this year, in Poet's Corner; so thither let us adjourn from our exhausting labours.'

‘You know the news?’ said Veronica, at the same time minutely scanning the urn that steamed in front of her, and in which she imagined, mistakenly however, that she had discerned a slight dint.

‘There is so much news nowadays,’ said the Poet, ‘it really is impossible to say whether one has heard it or not.’

‘The house and park are sold; and it remains to be seen whether the rest of the estate will not go with them.’

‘That is what comes,’ said Lamia, ‘of those mysterious things, agricultural depression, large families, and the death duties.’

‘Death duties, indeed!’ said Veronica severely. ‘I think it would be well if we heard less about death duties, and more about life duties. There never was the estate that could not be pulled round by its owners, with thought, labour, and thrift. There are very few landed properties, and for my part I care not how few they are, that can be kept clear from encumbrance, embarrassment, and finally from transfer to others, if they are regarded as milch cows, to support a house in town, to maintain a stable at Newmarket, and to pay for a yacht at Cowes. I wish to Heaven every

landowner in the country was so poor that he had no option but to live all the year round on his property.'

These revolutionary sentiments—or perhaps I am wrong, and they are sentiments of the profoundest conservatism,—held us all speechless for a few moments. Lamia was the first to take courage to break the silence.

'Yes,' she said, 'that would indeed be nice, and would restore the grace and vitality of country life. The head of the illustrious old family, the venerable squire himself, should be his own bailiff, the eldest son should be the gamekeeper, and amongst the younger scions of the house should be distributed the various offices of coachman—single-handed of course, for there must not be more than one horse and a pony kept,—of gardener with occasional help, of butler, footman, and odd-man. The mother of this large and model family would do the baking, and Veronica and I, if we had the honour of belonging to it, would wash up and make the beds. I do not see where the Poet would come in; for in a world thus economically arranged there would be no room for so profitless an occupation as verse-writing. Perhaps he could answer the front-door bell, and see to the coals.'

Lamia's irreverent fancy had at least the effect of rescuing us from a difficulty, for I could see we were on the verge of a dangerous controversy concerning life and duty in general, and country life and its duties in particular. Happily, too, she did not even now draw breath, but went on, though in a different vein.

'And now new people will possess the old place. How dreadful! Possibly they will be rich Americans.'

'Dear, dear Lamia,' said the Poet, with more austerity than is customary with him, 'when *will* you get rid of the worst of your prejudices? Who are new people? We are all old people in this England of ours. My gardener is just as old as you or I, I will be bound to say, in the sense in which you use the phrase, and he might, on investigation, turn out to be "older." In what does the newness of the purchasers of estates that are for sale consist? Sometimes, no doubt, wealth is got suddenly, and by unfair and unworthy means. But, as a rule, wealth won by commerce represents industry, probity, thrift, intelligence,—in a word, virtue; and virtue is the oldest and most venerable of all things.

All I ask from those whom you call new people is that they should show reverence for the old ways, and should have as keen a sense of honour and of obligation, when on the land, as they or their forebears exhibited in the market-place. The grace of country manners, even if they have it not already, will in time distinguish their descendants; and money amassed in cities will enrich the soil, adorn the landscape, and elevate the village. I am all in favour of "new people," when the "old people" confess, as I am profoundly sorry they should, that the burdens, or, as Veronica puts it, the duties, they inherited, are too heavy for their shoulders. And why not Americans? What a kindly people! How friendly, how unaffected! Not in the least ashamed of their "newness," though passionately curious concerning and profoundly reverential to the Past! In what do they differ from ourselves, except that they are, as a rule, free from certain conventions and affectations that too often mar the ease of English society? But they *are* ourselves, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, speaking the same tongue, thinking the same thoughts, educated by the same noble literature, and reciting the same ancient ritual. I wish for nothing better than that, without displacing our old territorial

families, place could be found on English soil for every American who wishes

Here to return, and die at home at last.'

Lamia has too much tact, and also too much real modesty, to differ from the Poet when he speaks in this earnest manner ; so she only said, very prettily, 'I am sure you are right' ; and then added, 'But there is worse news than what Veronica has told us.'

'What may that be?' he inquired.

'Your elm, your favourite elm, is uprooted, and lies prostrate on the ground.'

'I know it,' he said, 'and knew it three days ago, indeed on the very afternoon of its fall.'

'Three days ago! Then you have had time to write a mournful poem on the catastrophe.'

'I *have* written a poem,' he said, 'on my dear old elm. But you yourself shall judge if it be mournful.' Whereupon he recited to us the following lines :-

THE FALLEN ELM

I

The popinjay screamed from tree to tree,
Then was lost in the burnished leaves ;
The sky was as blue as a southern sea,
And the swallow came back to the eaves.

G

II

So I followed the sound of pipe and bleat
To the glade where my dear old Elm,
With head majestic and massive feet,
Rules over a grassy realm.

III

When lo ! where it once rose, robed and crowned,
Was naught but the leafless air :
Its limbs were low on the dinted ground,
And its body lay stripped and bare.

IV

Then I sate on the prostrate trunk, and thought
Of the times that I there had strayed
From the clamour and strife of tongues, and sought
The peace of its silent shade ;

V

And, with none anear save the browsing beeves,
Had lain and refreshed my soul
With the maiden grace of its waving leaves,
And the strength of its manly bole.

VI

And I said, ' Never more will the truant wind
Sit and swing in your lissom boughs ;
Never more in your branches the ringdove find
A nook for its nuptial vows.

VII

'Ne'er again will the thrifty squirrel store
In your hollows its wintry food,
And, unseen, in your rotted gnarls no more
Will the woodpecker hatch its brood.

VIII

'When the cuckoo and nightingale voice in parts
May's madrigal loud and clear,
And the kingfisher dives and the dragonfly darts,
You will neither feel nor hear.

IX

'Nor will swain and his sweet, when the wain's in
the shed,
And the shadows stretch long and dark,
Make tender tryst at your foot, and wed
Their names on your fluted bark.

X

'The seasons laugh at the seasons dead,
But never, when new Springs bleat,
Will you feel the sunshine around your head,
Or the moisture about your feet.

XI

'And when Autumn's flail on the granary floor
Falls muffled by mellow sheaves,
Old elm, you will mirror yourself no more
In the lake of your littered leaves.'

XII

Then in silence sadder than speech I sat,
When a tremor began to shake
The ribs of the elm as it lay there flat,
And a voice in the branches spake :

XIII

'Nay, pity me not, I am living still,
Though prone on the ploughed-up earth,
Though the woodreeve will lop me with hook and bill,
And the shroudmaker take my girth.

XIV

'Twas pleasant, when sap began to stir,
And branch, spray, and bud to shoot,
To hearken the newly-paired partridge whirr,
And the croak of the pairing coot ;

XV

'When the broodmare suckled her long-limbed foal,
To watch lovers meet and part,
And to feel, as they nestled against my bole,
The beat of each trusting heart.

XVI

'But full as oft as on loving kiss
I gazed upon lonely tear ;
And when drenched kine huddle and slant winds hiss,
Then living seemed long and drear.

XVII

'Now, when jackdaws starve and the blizzard bites,
And the furrows are flecked with sleet,
And the owl keeps snug in the thatch o' nights,
And the waggoner chafes his feet ;

XVIII

'When the empty nest in the leafless hedge
Sits sad where the sweet birds sang,
And the mallard croaks in the frozen sedge,
And the wings of the wildgeese twang ;

XIX

'When the lean hare nibbles the birch-tree bark,
And the stoat grows lank and thin,
And the cubs of the vixen prowl the dark,
And the gossips sit and spin ;

XX

'They will carry me in from the well-walled garth,
Where the logs are split and stored,
And lay me down where the blazing hearth
Glints warm on the beakered board.

XXI

'I shall roar my stave through the chimney's throat,
When the husky hindmen troll,
And flicker low when to children's note
The graybeard nods his poll :

XXII

'Watch the ploughboy duck for the crab and miss,
While the bedesmen munch their dole,
And the buxom wench leaves a lickerish kiss
On the rim of the rounding bowl :

XXIII

'See the children troop, ere they dint their beds,
And, hushing their pagan glee,
Raise dimpled hands, bow flaxen heads,
And pray at their mother's knee.

XXIV

'Or, perched perchance at the windmill top,
I shall gaze upon gray-roofed farms,
When the clouds are still and the hurricanes drop ;
Or up in my brawny arms

XXV

'Catch the idle winds as they lag at play,
That in toil they may take their share,
And round and round dip my foamless way
Through the sea of the shoreless air.

XXVI

'I shall listen, hushed, to the stars at night,
Shall abide betwixt earth and sky :
While one lives and works at a lofty height,
One may change, but one does not die.

XXVII

'In the stream you love, I may find a home,
Where the quince by the miller's door
Floats flowers as white as his unsluiced foam,
Or the meal on his powdered floor.

XXVIII

'And there I shall live in the mill-wheel's chase,
And sweat in the mid-day heat ;
But the spray of my making will cool my face,
And the water-drip bathe my feet.

XXIX

'I shall whirl till the wheat be ground and fanned
To meal for the cottager's pan :
O, 'tis merry and wise to go hand-in-hand
With Nature, to profit Man.

XXX

Or my boughs may be curved to the river-boat's keel,
And I, as the currents swing
And ripple about my ribs, shall feel
As if stirred with the sap of Spring.

XXXI

'My crew will be only Youth and Grace,
She lissom, he steel, of limb ;
His bronzed brow bent on her wildrose face,
And her wildrose face on him.

XXXII

'His voice will repeat some poet's song
To the stroke of the rhythmic oar,
Till her maiden pulses quicken and long
For the gleam of the syren shore.

XXXIII

'And when banks grow shady and oars at rest,
And we rudderless float and glide,
I shall feel their love-throbs within my breast,
And the grayling against my side.

XXXIV

'O, I am not dead, though my head droops low,
That used in the Spring to soar
To the sky half-way, and the friendless crow
Will nest in my fork no more.

XXXV

'Twas a cheery and wild-wood life I led,
But as pagan as bird or beast ;
For I never was christened, or churched, or wed,
Or tithed by the village priest.

XXXVI

'Now I should not wonder if they who fell
My timber and lop my bark,
Were to want a beam for the sexton's bell,
Or a desk for the limping clerk.

XXXVII

'I shall hear the chorister voices soar,
And the organ rise and roll ;
And I, who had only sense before,
Shall awaken and find my soul.

XXXVIII

'And when limbs, that oft through the driving sleet
Have staggered to sty and shed,
Are seen no more on the rustic seat,
But are stark on the hempen bed,

XXXIX

'My planks will make them both wall and roof,
As snug as the ling-thatched fold,
Where they never will hear a harsh reproof,
Nor ever feel cramp or cold.

XL

'So sorrow you not if I cease to soar,
And am sundered by saw and bill :
Rather hope that, like me, when you're green no more,
You may comfort your kindred still.'

XLI

Then the woodcutters came from their mid-day meal,
And I wandered, and felt no pang,
Though riving beetle and splintering steel
All day through the copses rang.

‘That is transmigration with a vengeance,’ said Lamia; ‘and, if we make allowance for your incurable optimism, we ought perhaps to thank you for transforming a dead elm into a living yule-log, a philosophising mill-wheel, a conscious river-boat, a self-complacent pulpit, and a sympathetic coffin. But I think you might have saved a few cheerful planks for a village cradle.’

This was Lamia’s way of conveying to the writer that she approved his effusion; and, turning to me, she said,—

‘Which part of it do you like best?’

‘Why, of course,’ I answered, ‘the passage about the jackdaws, the owls, and the mallard.’

‘O yes, and the stoats, and the wildgeese, and the lean hare, and the cubs of the vixen. That is always what touches you men.’

‘And you, Lamia?’ asked the Poet maliciously.

‘I! How can you ask? Why, the river-boat, her wildrose face and his bronzed brow, the love-throbs, and the gleam of the syren shore. But no. I am not quite sure that I should not like to be a vicariously-benevolent and personally-irresponsible windmill, that I might

Catch the idle winds as they lag at play,

That in toil they may take their share,

And round and round dip my foamless way
Through the sea of the shoreless air.

But Veronica remains silent. Tell us, Veronica,
which passage do *you* like best ?

'I like it all,' said Veronica. 'But what I
remember best, is,

While one lives and works at a lofty height,
One may change, but one does not die.'

'I thank you,' said the Poet, with a wise smile,
'if not for your compliments, at least for your
candour. Had you been complete strangers to
me, I should have now known you all most
intimately, by the preferences you have expressed.
Whatever else he may do, a critic reveals and
criticises himself.'

'Are you satisfied with *your* critics?' asked
Lamia.

'My dear Lamia,' he replied, 'have you ever
known me otherwise?'



IN VERONICA'S GARDEN

June 29th.

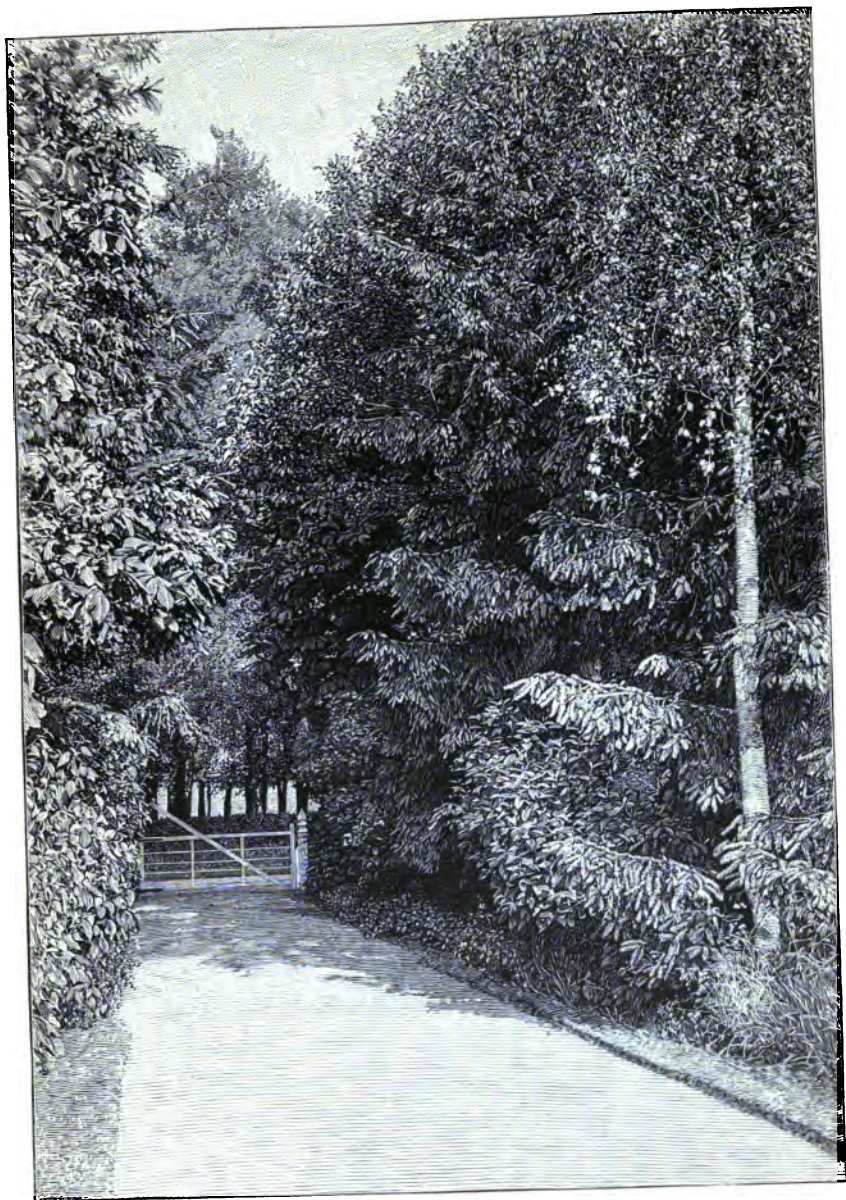
IF you are not something of a philosopher,—and by philosophy I understand a serene temper, and the maintaining of an equable mind under the sharpest disappointments,—I do not advise you to cultivate, or at any rate to grow enamoured of, a garden. On the 24th of May, I said we needed only a moist ending to that month, and a dripping introduction to June, for summer in the Garden that we Love to be garlanded with fairer and profuser flowers than ever before. From that day to this, and it

is now the 29th of June, we have not had one drop of rain, but, in lieu of it, a scorching sun, drying winds, and more than once a dangerously cold night. There have been local thunderstorms, but us they have not visited, and it is now nearly seven weeks since we had a shower of even the humblest pretensions.

Do you know what that means, in an English garden? It means incessant labour, daily and copious watering, and withal sadly inadequate results. Annuals that were planted in the open ground, and in the most careful manner, came up, and then died away; and others, grown for precaution's sake in pots or boxes, and then put out, have but stunted growth and a wizened aspect. Had it not been for the new well we sank last winter, there would hardly have been a garden to love. At the bottom of our meadow runs a stream in which, when the water is let down from the mill above, the Poet sometimes casts a fly, but, as a rule, with indifferent results; for, being much given to gazing on what he calls the Face of the Beloved, and noting every change of light and shade in the landscape within his range, he is but an unproductive fisherman. But he sometimes brings home a respectably-sized trout, and the know-

ing, who, however, themselves do not handle a rod, assert that the river is alive with fish in the season of the Mayfly. At one time I meditated bringing water, with the aid of a ram, right across the meadow into the garden, so that I might be independent of the whimsicalities of the weather. But, as the stream is a quarter of a mile away, it would have been a rather expensive business for a modest establishment like ours ; and I had not the courage, in the face of Veronica's searching financial inquiries, to carry out the project. The truth is, whenever I have been a little extravagant in the garden, she forthwith has always followed suit in the house ; and I suspect the Poet has likewise observed that circumstance, and frequently abstains from outlay in which he would otherwise indulge, for fear of setting a contagious example only too promptly followed. That is why I cannot daily soak the entire garden with water, as I should at times dearly love to do, and as one, alas ! ought to have done every evening during the last month.

But the little well has stood by me most bravely during the late bitter bad weeks ; and I should like, in common gratitude, to record its history. A new post was wanted last winter for the north gate that leads into the lane dividing us from the



‘THE WAY TO THE WELL’



Park at the back of the house ; and, in digging out the soil in order to fix it in its place, we came across water enough to make me suspect the presence thereabouts of a spring. I then remembered that hard-by had been the unsightly pond I had so foolishly drained and planted over ; and, on taking counsel with Old Mummery, I satisfied myself that, at a very trifling outlay, I might have an open well that would add to the picturesqueness of the spot, and do me good service in seasons of drought, like the present.

You will perhaps ask who is Old Mummery ? Old Mummery is our rustic patriarch. I do not know that he is any older than a good many other folks in the neighbourhood, but we seem to be agreed to look on him as preternaturally ancient, and he seems all the more venerable because we call him old. In any case, he is a goodish age, and he remembers a number of things everybody else seems to have forgotten, or never knew. That too would seem to justify us in calling him 'Old Mummery.' What, perhaps, adds yet further to his look of antiquity is the loss of one eye when he was a boy, by falling off a haystack on to a pitchfork ; though, if any one condoles with him on the subject, he always answers, 'I've never felt

the miss of it.' He is nearly always in work, as most honest, sober, industrious yokels are. But whenever he wants a bit of a job he comes to Veronica, who entertains a soft place for him, and who, indeed, has one for all who need it, provided they be not outrageous ne'er-do-weels. He has confided to her, at odd times, various portions of his history, with which she occasionally regales us. Early on in their acquaintance she had asked him if he had a wife. Why, of course, he had a wife, and five children, all fledged and out of the nest; all, that is, save one lass that stops at home to help her mother. And then he went on to tell Veronica how, when he was a young man, he got a-courting and engaged to a young woman 'Bethersden way,' a parish some four miles from the one in which he was born and dwelt. Thereupon the parson told him he ought to marry a girl in his own parish; and Old Mummery, who was young Mummery then, declared he was quite agreeable, provided the Bethersden girl would let him off his bargain.

'But,' he went on, 'the woman'—meaning his present wife—'wouldn't see it in no wise'; so he married her, in spite of her belonging to another parish, and a right good wife she had been to him.

On one occasion we employed Old Mummery, together with a neighbour of his, also for the moment out of work, to divert a gravel path for us ; and Veronica, who cannot tolerate loitering, and expects a good day's work to be done for a good day's wage, came to me and complained that the two men, instead of attending to their task, were perpetually engaged in animated conversation. On our inquiring the cause of these reiterated dialogues, it turned out that Old Mummery was trying to convert his companion to sound views concerning Predestination ; and, as conviction on this important point did not come quite as quickly as it might, the wheeling of gravel had to be constantly interrupted. Veronica is very anxious that everybody should think rightly on subjects of moment. But she objected strongly to anybody's conversion being effected at a cost of two and ninepence a day to my pocket ; and she ended by trying her own hand at conversion in turn, and endeavouring to make 'Old Mummery' understand that it was 'exceedingly dishonest'—I believe that was her phrase,—to argue about Prevenient Grace, when he ought to be plying his pick and using his shovel.

Old Mummery, having blessed my soul, when consulted by me about the likelihood of finding

water near the north gate, proceeded to add that he well remembered, when the Manor was occupied as a Farm, the cart-horses being led into the lane through an opening in the present kitchen-garden wall,—an opening long since vanished, but which you may, with a little trouble and much faith, still trace in it,—and their being watered at a pond that lay open to the road, and which pond was the very one I had filled up. Spring? Why, of course, there was a spring, and I should be sure to find water at four or five feet below the surface.

He proved to be a true prophet ; and we now have the dearest little well in the world under the shade of umbrageous chestnut trees, and which is approached by a comely path and shallow terraces of brick. On it our Latin-loving Poet, fresh from his memories of Papal Rome, has inscribed the words—

HANC AQUAM, VITIO AC VETUSTATE CORRUPTAM,
RESTITUIT ;

and then is appended his name, as that of the Pontifex Maximus who executed this mighty work. I have seen boastful Pontifical inscriptions on labours of less consequence.

During the last six weeks, the Well has been a place of constant pilgrimage for the water-barrels,

whose wheels, indeed whose gear generally, must by this time be pretty nearly worn out. Had not Veronica been away most of the time, I really do not know what I should have done; for her call on the resources of the stable would, as usual, have arisen daily, and I should not then have had at my disposal the services of the groom, who is never better pleased than when asked to lend a hand at something out of his own line. As it is, he has helped the two gardeners morning, noon, and evening, and to most account in the evening, since watering cannot be safely done in hot weather before that hour. I am afraid I shall fall under the displeasure of a certain new school of social economists, by confessing that, evening after evening, they all three worked a couple of hours' overtime, going home to tea at six, returning at half-past, and filling and emptying water-barrels till half-past eight. But, as they did this at their own suggestion, and were, of course, paid for extra labour, persons of more old-fashioned ideas, I hope, will not look on me as a slave-driver. But, truth to tell, I would, had it been in my power, have resorted to *corvée*, and have applied kourbash, rather than see the flowers shrivel and the garden perish. Has it not been said a thousand times



that love will commit any enormity for the sake of its desired object? and my chief, if not my only love in the world is, as you well know, Veronica's Garden, its beauty, its well-being, its perfection.

Unless you happen to be consumed by a kindred passion, you can have no idea of what we have had to do during the last six weeks. By 'we' I mean myself and the three excellent auxiliaries I have just named. I have said Veronica has been away most of the time, and need scarcely add that the Poet has likewise been absent; and I intend to try to induce them always to go away at this season, if only that I may carry out the transition from Spring to Summer in the Garden, without criticism, comment, or interference. Lamia wished to pay me a brief visit; and as, after the Garden, she has the largest share of my affections, I fear even its interests would not have led me to ask her to desist from carrying out her intention. But I might just as well have been virtuous on my own account; for Veronica protested that such a proceeding would have been 'most improper,' to the infinite vexation of Lamia, who, I need scarcely say, holds the conventional proprieties in utter abhorrence.

But I must not expatiate on that theme, attractive though it is, or I shall never describe the

herculean labours of the last few weeks, during the spell of inexorable drought, not yet at an end. First and foremost, all the beds in which there were tulips and forget-me-not had to be cleared, a certain portion of the forget-me-not to be laid in by the heels elsewhere, to ripen its seed and provide plants for next year, and all the tulips to be laid in other ground, that they too might mature. Then the beds had to be manured and dug, to be soaked with water, to be raked down, and to be thoroughly prepared for the summer plants awaiting them. We had to carry on these same operations, yet more elaborately and with yet more care and discrimination, in the borders under the house ; and there was not even a permanent bed or border anywhere where tulips and polyanthus were not lifted and removed, and the soil was not dealt with afresh, and in every instance copious supplies of water were indispensable. You would not thank me were I to describe everything we planted, and where we planted it, though I should dearly like to do so. But it may possibly be of use to you, if you happen to have a garden of your own, if I say that in two of the largest rectangular beds I have this year planted three rows of cannæ,

two rows of white-flowering marguerites, and an edging of the dwarf, shrubby, never-failing yellow zinnia. In another bed, an oval one, there is a centre of cannæ; round these, are yellow-flowering marguerites and dwarf bronze-leaved castor-oil plants, placed alternately; and the whole is carpeted with the dark-coloured heliotrope. In the star-shaped bed exactly opposite the front door, is a group of the new gladiolus-flowering cannæ,—I dare not tell Veronica I gave eighteen shillings a dozen for them,—encircled by two rows of scarlet begonias; and the angles of the star are filled with the silvery-leaved *Centaurea candidissima*. You see I still adhere to the principle of having a certain number of formal beds, if any one likes to call them such, in the company of informal ones where herbaceous plants and annuals grow side by side; and the Poet never tires of telling me that I am right, because I am acting, he says, in conformity with the secret of all true art, am classical and romantic at one and the same time, avoid uniformity and repetition, and produce greater interest, and greater effect as well, by the contrast.

As for the borders under the drawing-room and dining-room windows, you would think you had got hold of a nurseryman's catalogue, if

I were to set down all there is in them. I think there is every *salvia* that will grow in our latitude ; there is *calceolaria amplexicaulis*, there is *datura*,—how lovely are its white bell-shaped flowers!—*agathea celestis*, *cosmos*, the sweet-smelling tobacco plant, *plumbago capensis*, and *cufia* ; and among them are various zonal-leafed *pelargoniums*, *fuschias*, snapdragons, *pentstemons*, groups of *lobelia cardinalis*, and, of course, here and there, the golden-rayed lily of Japan. Every plant we put out was robust and well grown ; and to all of them we have granted abundant space. The edging, which is intended to be not too definite and precise, consists of alternate tuberous *begonias* and white-leafed *geraniums*. I can no more make you see what it will look like, or what it looks like already, by mere language, than I could were I to photograph it. But we are proud of our labours ; and you may thus perhaps acquire some notion of their nature and design.

But the annuals ! the annuals, whether sown in the open ground, or raised in boxes and then planted out, the *Zinnias*, the *Clarkias*, the *Godetias*, the *Gaillardias*, the *Salpiglossis*, the *Bartonia Aurea*, the Sweet Sultan, the Scabious, the Lupines, the Mallows,—there, I will stop !—they have never

been off my mind during any waking hour for the last month. Some people will tell you watering does no good in a garden, indeed does nothing but mischief. But believe me when I say that is the opinion only of those who lack either the ability, or the will, to water sufficiently. If you water at all, you must water copiously, and you must water over and over again. But, if the sun goes on shining, and the wind goes on blowing and drying everything, though you water annuals in the most careful fashion, and at the appropriate moment, I allow you may water in vain, and merely help them to their doom.

Which bed, which border, needed watering most? That was the daily inquiry. Was it the North Border, or the South Enclosure? Was it Poet's Corner, or the large centre beds? Was it the roses, the herbaceous plants, the newly-planted shrubs, the strawberries, the hollyhocks, or the rhododendrons? I have never passed through such an anxious time. Veronica, I say, was away, but she was coming back, and, as she had not been a witness of our perseverance, she would infallibly believe, if the Garden looked amiss, that we had been wanting either in energy or in intelligence.

But we have won, thanks to our acting, with unfaltering faith, on two good old mottoes, hackneyed if you will, but eternally true, *omnia vincit amor*, and *labor omnia vincit*. Love and Labour, acting together, what is there these two will not accomplish? And between them they have saved the Garden. We have overcome the difficulty even about the annuals; and I can see that, though rain still provokingly holds off, everything has 'started,' and Veronica may come now whenever she pleases.

June 30th.

We are all together again, and very well content at being so; and no one's contentment should exceed mine, if lavish praise can produce happiness. I had no idea the Garden was looking so lovely till they came and told me so, and told it with an effusion to which I am not accustomed. You see I had been living and working in it day after day, contending with difficulties and trying to ward off impending perils, and had therefore come to pay more attention to weak places than to strong ones, to be more vexed at supposed shortcomings than to exult over self-

evident beauties. In ordinary times, I am fully alive to the danger of cultivating overmuch the fastidious spirit, and of acquiring the habit of noting defects instead of observing merits. This is a foible, I think, in any occupation of life, but one easily falls into it if one is in pursuit of perfection. Aware, however, of the pitfall, I have long striven to avoid it, in the endeavour to perfect Veronica's Garden; and it was only exceptional solicitude that had caused me, for once, to be too little sensible to its unequalled charms.

'Go away for twenty-four hours,' said Lamia generously, 'and on coming back you will see how beautiful it is.'

'Why, it is perfect,' exclaimed Veronica; and you know what unqualified eulogy means from her. 'All excepting the grass, which is a little brown, and that you could not possibly have prevented. Look at the tea-roses, especially at those you got the year before last. I could not have believed it possible for roses to be so large, so lovely, and in such profusion. There are hundreds of them that would carry off a prize in any Rose-Show in the world.'

'And I almost think the China roses you got from Lyons last autumn are more enchanting still,'

said the Poet. '*Laurette Messimy, Jean Sisley, and Cramoisie Supérieure*, as I look on them now, have a refinement all their own ; yet they flower as prodigally as though they were the commonest things in life.'

I quite tingled with self-complacency ; and, finding them in this appreciative mood, I naturally led them everywhere, from bed to border, from walled garden to copse garden, from parterre to wilderness, and wherever I took them they maintained the chorus of compliment and congratulation. The variegated Comfrey, the Blue Grass, the *Centaurea Macrocephala*, the *Spiræa Venusta*, the *Scolymus* or Oyster Plant, the Astilbe, the Goat's-beard Columbine, the Japanese Irises, the semi-tropical Cannæ, the white, pink, and purple Canterbury Bells, the dazzling Sweet-Williams, the Shirley Poppies (for whose abounding beauty I can find no adequate words of praise), the Swan Poppies, the Pæony Poppies, the Madonna Lilies, the Mignonette that was everywhere, the Roses on the house, the great big Rose-bushes in unexpected places, the Japanese briars, the *Heracleum* or Giant Cow Parsnip, twelve feet high,—they raved about them all. How I blessed the dear little well, that, emptied every night, by every morning had

refilled itself! How grateful I felt to my brother-workers, to whom, in the fulness of my gratitude, I promised a day's excursion to the Metropolis.¹

'And now,' said Veronica, 'that we have surveyed and duly admired the flowers, which certainly are most creditable to you, I should like to see what vegetables you have for me.'

This inquiry, which is made at settled intervals with a certain severity of tone, usually fills me with apprehension, for Veronica is somewhat exacting on the practical side, and expects to have an ample supply for culinary purposes at every season of the year. More than once, I have heard her say to visitors, when taking them into the copse kitchen-garden :

'The peculiarity of this kitchen-garden is that it contains no vegetables, though roses, hollyhocks, and sunflowers, as you perceive, flourish exceedingly.'

I will not deny that, in the months to which they belong, hollyhocks, roses, and sunflowers, are to be seen everywhere. Indeed I regard them as

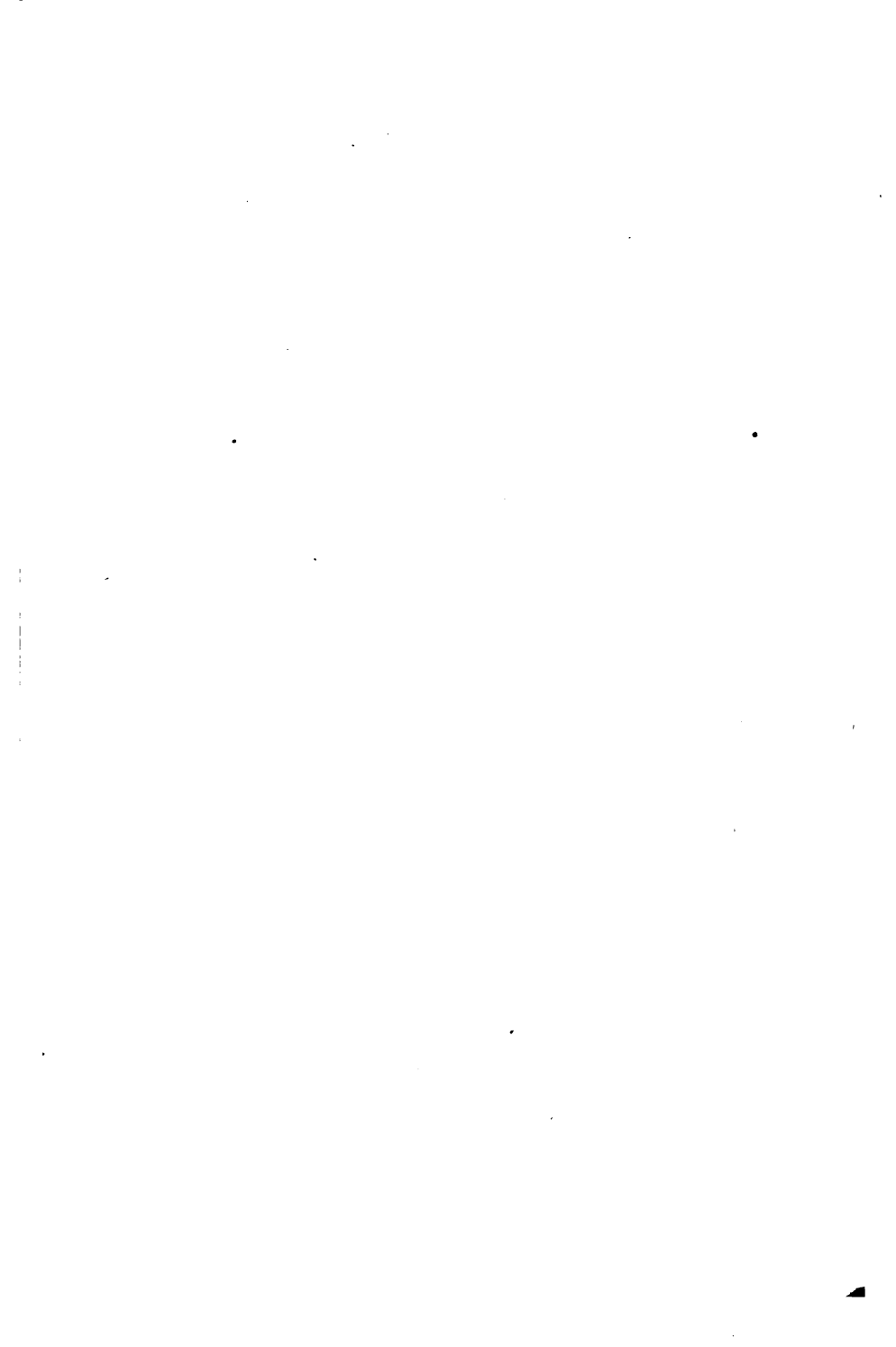
¹ They have since had their day in Town, and availed themselves of the opportunity to pay a visit to Kew, of whose flowers, on their return, they spoke very slightly when compared with those in Veronica's Garden. I must give them another holiday.

a great adornment to a bed of cabbages, or to an incipient plot of Brussels sprouts. I plead guilty, without shame, indeed with pride, to letting snapdragons bloom on the top of celery trenches, and to allowing casual, or it may be deliberate, Swan poppies and evening primroses to lend a variety to potato-furrows ; and I cram flowers, I frankly own, along the borders of all the kitchen-garden paths.

‘Well, come and see for yourself,’ I said, for it happened that on this occasion I had little to fear from the most exacting criticism. The Maiden’s-Blush Roses, the Horned Poppies, the Peruvian Lilies, the Lavender, the Woodruff, these, and many another shrub, plant, and flower, asserted their right to be present even in a plot of ground supposed to be dedicated rather to use than to ornament ; and, far from being ashamed of two rows of sweet peas, one pure white, the other deep carmine, I called Veronica’s attention to them before directing it to their edible neighbours. For, side by side with these, stood disciplined row after row of well-grown William Hurst, Champion of England, William the First, all duly mulched, strong and green in the bine, long and full in the pod. Between them were

well-set-out lines of Spinach, ready for table; and, while you could smell the flowers of the broad beans in one place, you could, if you were observant, see that in another they were ready to shell. I thought Veronica cast a hasty glance of disapproval at a goodly patch of Carnations; but, before she could reprove me for trespassing thus farther on kitchen-garden soil with my eternal flowers, her eye fell on a splendid bed of French lazy lettuce, and on another of equally fine cabbage lettuce, and these completely disarmed her. A certain number of them were duly tied up to 'make hearts'; and, when she had gone her rounds, she was good enough to say everything looked exceedingly well. How could she possibly have said anything else? The French kidney beans, the butter beans, the haricots verts, the Scarlet Runners, the artichokes, all wore the most promising aspect.

Though I hardly like to say so, Veronica is not, as a rule, quite just to the Poet and me,—for she regards us as joint accomplices in the matter,—in regard to the growing of vegetables. I vow I take the liveliest interest in this department of the Garden, though I freely own I labour to correct the natural lack of comeliness in its





‘MORE GRACEFUL COMPANIONS FROM ELSEWHERE’

products by giving them more graceful companions from elsewhere.¹ I do not think it would be possible to take more pains with the cultivation of strawberries; and, had it not been that I have just set down such glowing panegyrics from others on the tea-roses, I would myself have indulged in like superlatives—for verily they are equally deserved,—concerning the crop of Noble, Pauline, Sir Joseph Paxton, British Queen, Doctor Hogg, Coxcomb, and Elton Pine. Veronica has them for the table, three times, nay, frequently four times, a day, for six weeks at least, of enormous size, and in great abundance, so that there is no lack of them in the Servants' Room, or in the men's cottages; and preserving, it seems to me, goes on perpetually. But do not suppose this result is produced by walking about with a self-complacent air, and paying so much in wages on Saturday night. Saint Paul

¹ The Poet reminds me that I am not so original in this respect as I seem to imagine, and that there was once an old Corycian swain concerning whom we are told in the Fourth Georgic :

“Hic rarum tamen in dumis olus, albaque circum
Lilia, verbenasque, premens, vescumque papaver,
Regum æquabat opes animis.”

I am delighted to find I have unconsciously followed so ancient a precedent.

did not struggle with wild beasts at Ephesus more determinedly than I struggle with the strawberry-beds. I take the very earliest runners I can get, and I have them by the middle of August, at the latest, as new plants in ground specially and liberally prepared for them, and I place them three feet apart. I never keep a strawberry plant more than three years, and Noble and Pauline I keep for only two. Each plot has its label, bearing not only the name of the strawberry, but the date when it was first put into the ground, so that I may know which are first, which second, and which third year old plants. They are heavily mulched in the Autumn, mulched again in the Spring before being forked over; and they have three libations of liquid manure when they are in flower and forming fruit. This year, during that terrible drought, we watered them thrice likewise with clear water, and the consequence is, while many of our neighbours say that, thanks to the dry weather, they have none, or but few and small ones, ours are monsters in size and myriad in numbers; and never have I known them so good, for the sun has saturated them with sugar, and given to them a uniform colour. If you ask me, which on the

whole is the best strawberry, I answer, Sir Joseph Paxton, and this unquestionably should be your main crop. I put some in a very warm, some in a very cool, and some in a temperate position; so that they come into bearing within a week after Noble and Pauline, and last till within a week of Coxcomb, Elton Pine, and Latest of All. Of course, they have to be netted against the thrushes and blackbirds; though, whenever any of these get under the net, as they often contrive to do, they are caught and set free. Frogs, snails, and mice, are likewise partial to strawberries, and so are the squirrels. Yesterday the parlour-maid, on going into her pantry, found an old squirrel nibbling at a bowl of them that was standing on her table. He had evidently scented them from afar, and had entered by the passage window that usually stands open. On seeing her, he whisked about all over the place, at length contriving to make his exit.

I daresay these technical details of gardening, in which I from time to time indulge, seem rather tiresome to persons who buy their strawberries in Covent Garden market, pay their money, consume the fruit, and wish to hear nothing more about it. But that is a town way of looking at

the matter, and we are simple country folk who would have no occupation at all, and nothing whatever to interest us, if we did not take pleasure in studying the humours of flowers, fruits, and vegetables. You see we have no Four-in-Hand Meets to go to, no Trooping of the Colours to attend, no Botanical Fêtes, no Water-Parties, Balls, Routs, and what not, to engage our attention; and, though you will think us very spiritless, we read of such things in the daily prints, but have no desire to be present at them. We have seen them all, in our time, and wish for no repetition of these artificial delights. But, when the first swallow makes its appearance, whoever is the first to see it calls to the others, in the language of the Rhodian boys, 'See! Swallow, swallow! Spring is coming!' and we all watch the renewed sweep and gleam of the graceful wings, as though we had never seen these before, though, in truth, it is because we have seen them so often that we love them so, and think so much of them. The first blackbird's nest, the first Red Admiral butterfly, the first call of the cuckoo, the first sob of the nightingale, we note and talk of these things with, if you like, a perfectly childish pleasure, and we revel in them as I suppose you revel in the most

recent triumph of Sir Henry Irving and Miss Ellen Terry at the Lyceum, or in the return of Signor De Rezske to the Opera-House. As for the swifts, when they first come careering round the stationary chimney-stacks, we spend the entire afternoon watching their matchless motion, and make old-world observations about them, which to us seem quite original. When the first strawberries ripen, we divide them equally between Veronica and Lamia ; and they share and share alike also in the earliest *Céline Forestier* or *Triomphe de Rennes* roses, for the Poet and I consider these have a peculiarly romantic fragrance. We none of us ever tire of the coming again of the natural sights and sounds that have come scores of times before ; and it is the oldest of these, when they reappear, that always seem the newest and the freshest. We are a little jealous as to who shall observe the first evening primrose open, who bring home the first wild musk-rose. If you are wise, you will not despise these details, for everything depends on the close observation of them. But forgive me ! I daresay, like Lamia, you think I have moralised quite enough.

I sometimes wish that I could, as she too flatteringly says I occasionally do, confuse the

Calendar, and have all the beautiful things beautiful at one and the same time. But this may not be ; and, now when the Garden has extorted even from Veronica enthusiastic admiration, the graceful long grass in the orchard, and also that on either side of the orchard drive, has been cut down, for the haymaking season is on us. It was a suggestion of the Poet that the orchard—by which I mean both that portion of it which is now stocked with young apple-trees, and that portion which I cleared of old ones in order that we might enjoy an unimpeded view of the Park,—should every year be laid in for meadow. This is not model farming, I grant ; but, as it is handsomely manured, I do not think it is suffering any deterioration at our hands. The orchard and the meadow together cover about twenty acres of ground ; and it has lately been sublet to Old Mummery, who thinks, if the Poet pays the rates and taxes, he can make an honest penny by it. But it is stipulated not only, as I say, that there shall be haymaking every year in the orchard, but that the sheep shall be removed from it in time for them not to injure the daffodils, on whose unimpaired beauty in March, among the apple-trees, the Poet sets great store.

The long meadow grass, therefore, was cut

yesterday ; to-day it has been made into hay ; to-morrow it will be led. This rapid making of it is due to the hot dry weather, and I need scarcely say the crop is not a first-rate one. But we have enjoyed every moment of the haymaking, the whetting of the scythes in the early morning, for there are no hateful, noisy, new-fangled machines at work, the shaking out of the swathes, the tedding, and the raking into long rows ; and now Lamia insists that we must have tea amongst it, and must ourselves carry out tray, cups, and platter, not forgetting one of the immemorial urns, ourselves lay the cloth, ourselves boil the water, ourselves set out the strawberries and cream, and, as Veronica observes, make a thorough mess generally. The Poet is in high glee, for he loves *al fresco* meals, and is so reluctant to eat, or even to live, indoors at all, that Veronica says she is quite sure he was changed at nurse, and was born under a hedge. Certainly his tastes are of the gipsy sort. I confess I should not like Lamia to be housekeeper on all occasions. But, with my help and that of the Poet, for Veronica looked on with quiet, compassionating amusement, we managed tolerably well, though I own we did upset one jug of milk, and a certain portion of the strawberries were literally as well as

metaphorically—the metaphor is one Lamia has picked up somewhere,—made hay of. Old Mumery and his helpmates, together with the young children that always hang round haymaking operations with fascinated gaze, were given tea and the bulk of the fruit ; and, when they had all retired and gone homeward, Lamia declared that so high a Festival would be incomplete without a poem of some kind. Once the litter of Lamia's open-air festivity removed, Veronica, like the rest of us, surrendered herself to the charm of the hour. The air was impregnated with the scent of hay and the fragrance of the elder. From where we sate, we could see the Garden, and the front of the house all smothered in roses. And now, as if to enchain us to the spot, a song-thrush in the contiguous copse serenaded with melody what to us, sitting there together, seemed the whole world. Then, not to refuse Lamia's request, the Poet recited the following verses :—

A TWILIGHT SONG

I

Why, rapturous bird, though shades of night
Muffle the leaves and swathe the lawn,
Singest thou still with all thy might,
As though 'twere noon, as though 'twere dawn ?

Silence darkens on vale and hill,
But thou, unseen, art singing still.

II

'Tis because, though in dusky bower,
With love delighted still thou art ;
Nor hath the deepening twilight power
To lay a curfew on thy heart.
Thou lovest ; and, loving, dost prolong
The sense of sunlight with thy song.

III

Thus may love's rapture haunt me still
When life's full radiance fadeth slow
Along the faltering west, and fill
With melody my afterglow,
And something of Song's morning might
Linger, to make you doubt 'tis night.

'I wish I were a poet,' said Lamia.

To tell the truth, I was thinking the same thing, and wishing I had written even such humble verse as the foregoing, for then perhaps Lamia would treat me with more consideration.

'No doubt, Lamia, you do,' said Veronica.
'But why?'

'Because,' said Lamia, 'it must be so nice to spend one's life sauntering in gardens, strolling about parks, or leaning over brawling brooks,

and suddenly to find you have written something about which people exclaim, "How charming! how beautiful!" and so to become a much-flattered, and, possibly, an immortal person, at the smallest expenditure of labour I have ever heard of. And then, how delightful it must be to open the post-bag in the morning, and to receive from lovely creatures—I suppose, since he never sees them, his generous imagination pictures them all as lovely,—the tenderest expressions of homage, with humble requests for just a few lines for their Birthday Book.'

'I never see any such letters,' said Veronica quite seriously, and with a poorer sense of humour than she usually displays.

'I give them all to Lamia,' said the Poet, with a more correct view of the situation.

'Yes,' said Lamia, 'and I shall publish them some day. But, if you think the three brief stanzas you have just recited are of sufficient importance for an occasion like this, you evidently have but a poor opinion of the banquet I provided for you. Gratitude demands a somewhat longer effusion. Suppose you recite "A Reply To A Pessimist," which I know you have written, for Veronica told me you had.'

'It is rather long,' said the Poet deprecatingly, 'and, I am afraid, a little prosy. A good deal of what one writes is best forgotten.'

'Then,' said Veronica, 'recite to them "If You Were Mine!"'

'O yes, do!' said Lamia. 'That sounds peculiarly promising, and admirably suited to this romantic occasion.'

So, without more ado, the Poet began.

'If you were mine, if you were mine,
The day would dawn, the stars would shine,
The sun would set, the moon arise,
In holier and yet heavenlier skies.
Then unto me the Year would bring
A younger April, fresher Spring.
I should not then seek sylvan ways
For primrose clusters, woodbine sprays,
To hear the mavis' matin tale,
Or nocturn of the nightingale.
For at your coming there would pass
A glow, a glory, o'er the grass,
The flowers would in your gaze rejoice,
The wildwood carol in your voice,
Returning gleam chase lingering gloom,
And life be never out of bloom,
If you were mine!

'If you were mine, I should not know
In what fair month the roses blow,

IN VERONICA'S GARDEN

When the pure lily bares her brow,
Or ringdoves coo their nuptial vow.
For, with your hand soft-clasped in mine,
I still should smell the eglantine,
And, wheresoe'er our steps should stray,
The incense of the new-mown hay.
By restless wave or restful mere,
In wanderings far or wanderings near,
On cheerful down, in pensive glen,
It would be always Summer then,
If you were mine.

‘If you were mine, I should not fear
The warnings of the waning year,
The garnering sickle, girdled sheaf,
The falling acorn, floating leaf,
Moisture of eve and haze of morn,
Pearls turned to rubies on the thorn,
The silvering tress on fading brow,
The dimples that are furrows now.
For, leaving summits once I clomb,
With you, would seem but wending home.
Leaning on love in life's decline,
More sweet the shadow than the shine,
The cushat's perch than swallow's wing,
And Autumn peace than pomp of Spring,
If you were mine.

‘If you were mine, how then should I
Heed frozen fallow, churlish sky,
Bleak, songless branches, sapless rind,

The wailing of the homeless wind,
The dwindling days, the deepening snow,
The dull, dead weight of wintry woe?
For, harkening to the Christmas peal
Without, our hearts within would feel,
In glowing rafter, flickering blaze,
The sunshine of departed days,
And round the hearth dear memories swarm
To keep life young, to keep love warm,
If you were mine.'

'Go on,' said Veronica, for he seemed to pause.

'Yet you *are* mine, yes, you are mine.
No length of land, no breadth of brine,
Can keep whom spirit links, apart,
Or make an exile of the heart.
And when from soul, no more the thrall
Of sense, the fleshly fetters fall,
And, purified by combats past,
Long-martyred love is crowned at last,
You then before the Heavenly Throne
Will take my hand, nor blush to own,
That you *were* mine!'

'How shocking!' exclaimed Lamia, starting to her feet. 'I wonder Veronica permits you to write such verses!'

Of course, I well understood the theatrical nature of the protest, but did not at first surmise

her real purpose. Neither, as his back was towards her, did the Poet. But, in another moment, he was smothered in hay, and, as he strove to free himself from it, Lamia pelted him with more. I took part with her, and Veronica sided with her lord, and we gave Old Mummery's hay another good tossing.

‘Enough! enough!’ cried Veronica, at last. ‘We really must stop, for Lamia is getting too hot, and now I must take her in.’

At the word of supreme command we desisted, linked hands, climbed the low, almost invisible, fence that divides the orchard from the lawn, and then Lamia's clear young voice burst forth in song :

When June is wreathed with wilding rose,
And all the buds are blown,
And O, 'tis joy to dream and doze
In meadows newly mown,
Go take her where the graylings leap,
And where the dabchick dives,
Or where the bees from clover reap
The harvest for their hives ;
For Summer is the season when,
If you but know the way,
A maid that's kissed will kiss again,
And pelt you with the hay,
The hay,

And then we all sang in chorus,

And pelt you with the hay.

A couple of hours later the Poet and I were walking slowly up and down the tennis-lawn. It was nearly a quarter to nine, and we had not yet dined; for whether, in order to please the Poet, who dearly loves the twilight, or because he has contrived to imbue her with the notion that he has his happiest inspirations at that hour, Veronica, who never would have dinner a minute later than eight in old days, has recently become very indulgent in that respect, to our inexpressible contentment. The rooks were returning from the Marsh, and were passing over our heads in unmarshalled myriads. Now they came in a serried mass, now in loose order, now by thousands at a time, then by twenties, then by fours and fives, and then a straggler or two seemed to be bringing up the rear. Finally, the last one of all came, hurrying up, much behind time, with a loud, solicitous caw, as much as to say, 'All right, I am coming.' Then the noise of homeward-bound wings subsided utterly, and only the wayward flight of a foraging bat intruded on the peaceful gloaming. There was the stillness as of sleep and

rest, and we instinctively paused, as if even the subdued sound of our footfall on the sward were a profanation of the silence. Suddenly, through the open windows of the drawing-room, Lamia's voice came out to us, silvery and clear, if somewhat tremulous :

'Tis because, though in dusky bower,
With love delighted still thou art ;
Nor hath the deepening twilight power
To lay a curfew on thy heart.
Thou lovest ; and, loving, dost prolong
The sense of sunlight with thy song.

'Yes!' said the Poet, 'Love and Song. There is nothing else worth having. These two are enough.'

'And a garden,' I suggested.

'And a garden,' he rejoined.

'And fair, faithful women,' I added.

'Yes, and fair, faithful women,' he answered.
'But have we not mentioned them already? For are not they the guardians of Love, and the inspirers of Song?'

July 10th.

WE have had one beneficial shower, but only one, and we all revelled in it, and I fondly imagined it would suffice for all the wants of the Garden. But the yet sunnier days that followed have frustrated that simple hope, and everything would be looking better if we could but have twenty-four hours' continuous wet. But I do not know that any of us are entitled to the exact amount of moisture and sunshine we may happen to desire, and I confess it displeases me to hear people speaking harshly of the weather, as they so often do. Though periodical showers best suit the needs of an English garden, as indeed of everything that grows in our temperate island, it must be an ill sun that brings nobody good. Lamia, who is much more pleased to have settled fine weather than that I should acquire credit for green sward and well-furnished flower-beds, declares it is an absolutely perfect summer.

Perfect it certainly is for those who have no farm to think of and no garden to care for, and, for our part, we are wise enough to extract from it all the pleasure possible. It has been very hot, all day; and we have been sitting about, each in a different

nook, according to his fancy. Now and again I have been pulling off the wilted flowers of the Canterbury Bells, for, if so treated, they will bloom afresh, and their seed-vessels are not, like those of Love-In-A-Mist, beautiful to look at. Indeed they are obtrusively untidy. I have also been contemplating the white cluster-roses with which the front of the house, from ground to gable, is now almost covered, and admiring the contrast made by the Clematis that cunningly inserts its purple flowers among them. What Veronica is doing, I do not know, but something serviceable, you may be quite sure. The Poet is sitting in a favourite spot of his, whence he commands the house and most of the garden. He has a book in his lap, but he does not read it. Indeed, he rarely reads ; and Veronica sometimes says she is not quite sure that he can. Works of to-day she rarely induces him to read ; and, but for her, who is very catholic in her taste in regard to books, he would remain yet more ignorant than he is concerning them. To the medley of printed matter which Lamia eagerly devours, he exhibits an invincible aversion.

‘I do not like low company,’ he sometimes says to her. ‘I prefer good society ; and, most

of all, I love the companionship of my betters.' And he holds up the *Paradiso*, which he has been dipping into for, I should think, the thousandth time. Lamia has been practising, both at the piano and on her guitar ; but, now that the quiet and cool of evening have arrived, she comes into the garden, bent on drawing us all together.

'Let us sit under the limes,' she says. 'There are tiers on tiers of broad green leaves, and myriads of pendulous flowers that almost intoxicate one with their honeyed fragrance ; and among them the bees are making music better than any of mine, or even of the Poet's.'

Under the limes, therefore, we settled ourselves, sitting in their scented sunshine-shadow, and gazing out at the orange lilies that, even when the shades of evening begin to gather, seem still to make a sort of mid-day sunshine of their own.

But there is something amiss with the Poet to-day. As a rule, when his mood is not actually playful, he exhibits a cheerful gravity which causes Veronica to say his motto might well be that of the sundial, *Horas non numero nisi serenas*. But, this evening, a shadow seems to have fallen on his accustomed serenity. I half suspected the cause, and so apparently did Lamia ; for, when he

returned to one of her sallies an unusually brief and merely formal reply, she observed, 'I do not think you much cared for your visitor of this morning.'

'To tell the truth,' he replied, 'I did not. He is a very gifted person, but he talked incessantly about his own writings, and tried to get me to talk about mine, in which I need hardly say he did not succeed. He has had much praise for some rather slight performances. I think he has been overpraised; indeed, is not everybody overpraised in these days, who is praised at all? We are passing through a period of exaggeration; everybody shouting loud lest he should not be heard when everybody else is talking, and writing with excessive emphasis for fear he should not be read when the whole world is putting pen to paper. Yet, Lamia, you must have observed, during those pleasant expeditions when you are good enough to carry the trout-net that is so rarely brought into play, it is not the biggest fish that in rising makes the greatest splash; and, were our visitor of this morning a little more observant, or perhaps were he himself a bigger fish, he would be well content with the noise he has made in this world, instead of lamenting himself as the most unappreciated writer of his time.'

‘Is there not a passage somewhere,’ asked Lamia, ‘about the *genus irritabile vatum*?’

‘There is,’ he replied, ‘and I am not surprised at your remembering it, for the irritability of some of them at least seems to be on the increase. It is perhaps natural that it should be, seeing they are made more than ever self-conscious by the amount of interest, and the peculiar kind of interest, manifested in poets during the last few years. I think we have had a little too much of this, and do not require to be told any more about the neglect Wordsworth encountered during the greater part of his lifetime, about the small sale of Shelley’s works before he died, of Byron’s somewhat imaginary sorrows, and of Keats’s name written in water. The result has been that many people have come to look on poets, and poets sometimes to look on themselves, as ill-fated beings who learn in suffering what they teach in song, and who must take care on no account to be happy, if they value their reputation.’

‘I have always understood from you,’ said Veronica, ‘that Horace must have been the best of company, and that even the pious Virgil had the most equable and contented temper.’

‘I wish they were with us this evening,’ he

rejoined, 'and there would then have been no cause for my remonstrances, which I beg you to forgive.' By this time he had quite recovered his accustomed manner, and went on in a tone of almost boyish cheerfulness. 'Veronica has just mentioned Virgil; and, since I have more than once translated the passage for you, I may again be permitted to cite the lines :

Me vero primum dulces ante omnia Musæ,
Quarum sacra fero, ingenti percussus amore,
Accipiant, cœlique vias, et sidera monstrent.

Fancy being admitted to an understanding of the ways of Heaven, and the secret of the stars, and yet being miserable! These are the Joys, not the Sorrows, of Genius. No Peer, no Prince, is as privileged as that; and the most potent Monarch rules over no such Realm. If a man thinks he is a poet,—and I can hardly imagine any one so presumptuous as to do more than entertain a very humble hope on the subject,—should not the companionship of the *dulces ante omnia Musæ* be enough for him, without his troubling himself about the precise amount of praise or censure bestowed on his necessarily imperfect account of what the Muses have said to him? Old John-

son was scarcely a poet, and he was not always a just critic. But we owe to his robust sense what seems to me the most pertinent remark ever made about both: "Fancy," he says, "a man who has written a poem which he hopes will live, remembering a criticism which he knows will die."

'You ought,' said Veronica, 'to have quoted that for the benefit of our visitor of this morning.'

'I did; but I fear he is too far gone in infatuated self-consciousness, and in an exaggerated estimate of the relation of himself and his works to things in general, to be much benefited by it. A writer cannot take his occupation too seriously. He cannot take himself too lightly. Indeed, though I have no wish to protest against your playful and kindly christening of me, and if you will not think me in turn indulging in some exaggeration, I will say there is no such thing as a Poet, but only a person who, in a certain condition of mind, writes what is called poetry, and who can no more write it, when he is not in that condition, than the most prosaic of his neighbours. The most important thing in life is to be a man, the next most important, I suppose, to be a gentleman. After that one may be anything under the sun, only one must not vociferate its praises from the

housetop, because it happens to be one's own vocation. Do you remember those admirable lines of Boileau?

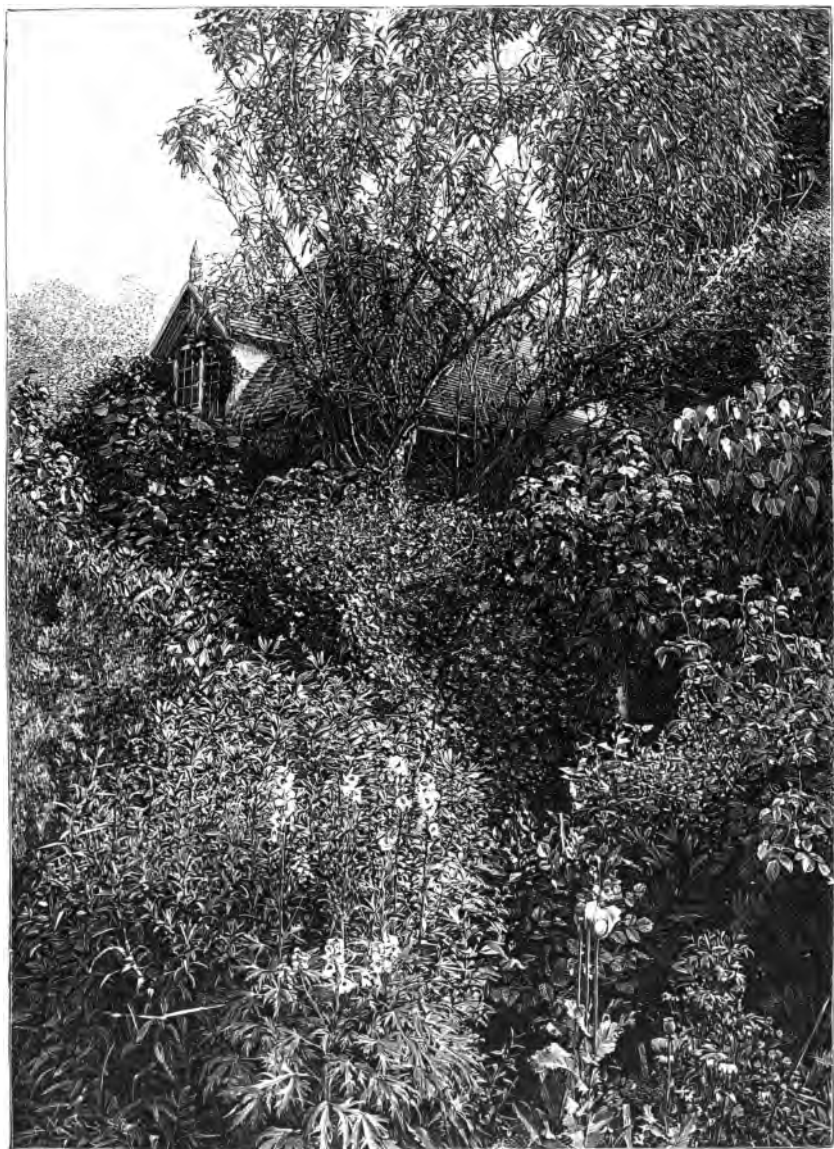
Que les vers ne soient pas votre éternel emploi.
Cultivez vos amis, soyez homme de foi.
C'est peu d'être agréable et charmant dans un livre,
Il faut savoir encore et converser et vivre.'

'You have been both *agréable* and *charmant*, my dear Poet,' said Lamia, rather fulsomely I thought, till she followed it up with the qualification, 'but I will not conceal from you that I think you *have*, in the zeal of your house, fallen into some little exaggeration.'

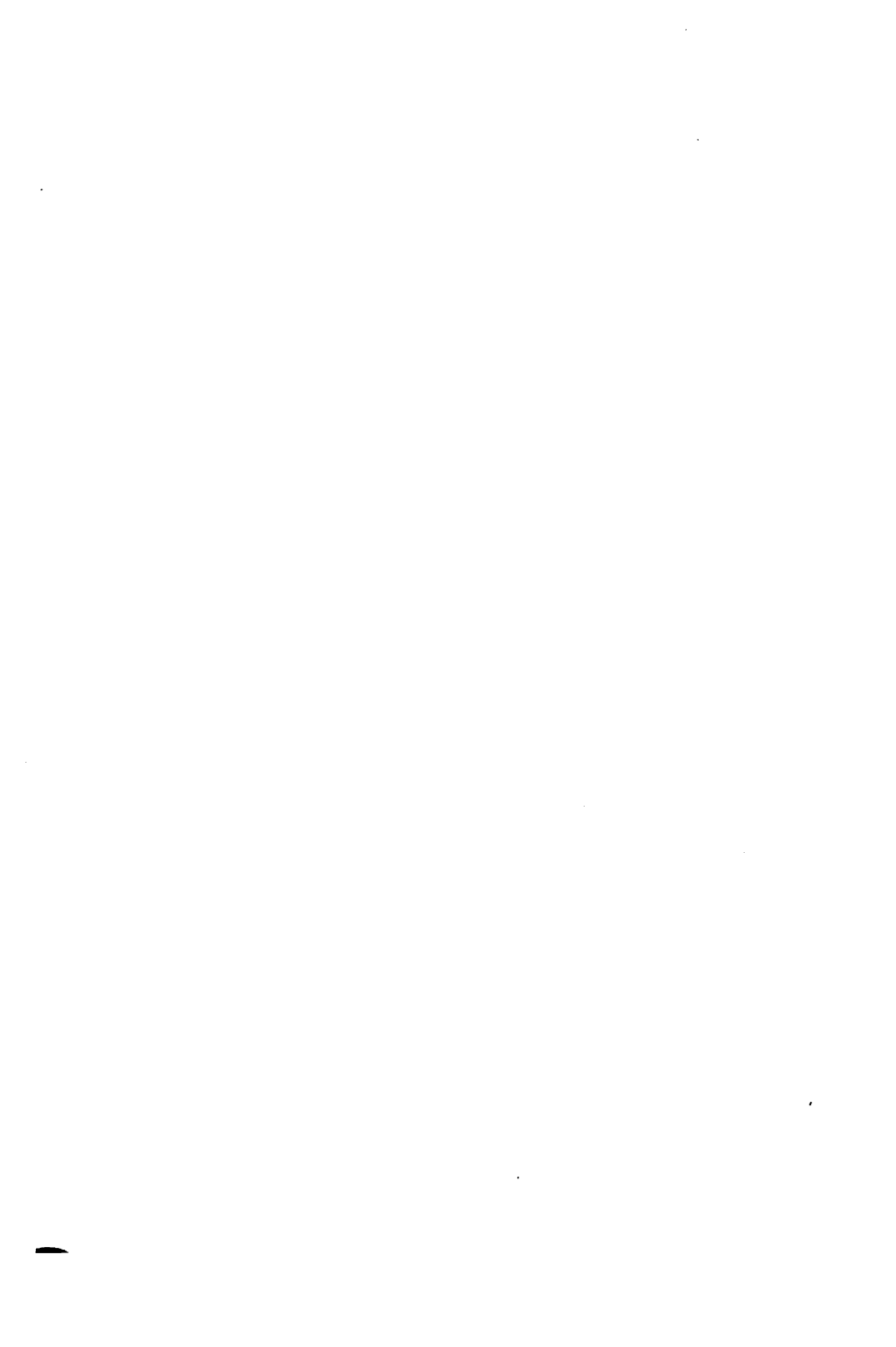
'One always does, in prose,' he replied quietly. 'Will you bear with me while I try to tell you what I think, with more accuracy, in verse?'

'Were I a Poet, I would dwell,
Not upon lonely height,
Nor cloistered in disdainful cell
From human sound and sight.
I would live nestled near my kind,
Deep in a garden garth,
That they who loved my verse might find
A pathway to my hearth.

'I would not sing of sceptred Kings,
The Tyrant and his thrall,



‘DEEP IN A GARDEN GARTH’



But everyday pathetic things,
That happen to us all :
The love that lasts through joy, through grief,
The faith that never wanes,
And every wilding bird and leaf
That gladdens English lanes.

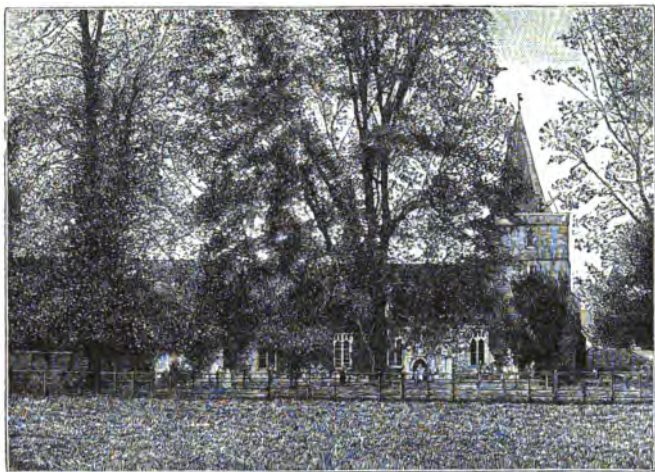
‘Nor would I shape for Fame my lay,
But only for the sake
Of singing, and to charm away
My own or other's ache ;
To close the wound, to soothe the smart,
To heal the feud of years,
And move the misbelieving heart
To tenderness and tears.

‘And when to me should come the night,
And I could sing no more,
And faithful lips could but recite
What I had sung before,
I would not have a pompous strain
Resound about my shroud,
Nor sepulchre in sumptuous fane,
Near to the great and proud.

‘But only they who loved me best
Should bear me and my lyre,
And lay us, with my kin, at rest
Under the hamlet spire,
Where everything around still breathes
Of prayer that soothes and saves,

And widowed hands bear cottage wreaths
To unforgotten graves.

'And they might raise another cross
Within that hallowed ground,
And tend the flowers and trim the moss
About my grassy mound ;
But, honouring me, would carve above
No impious boast of Fame,
And, not for Glory, but for Love,
Would keep alive my name.'



IN VERONICA'S GARDEN.

October 1st.

I SHOULD not wonder if you sometimes think the tending of a garden, as I describe it, though it may be a labour of love, is incessant and never-ending, and this may dispose you to ask when it is that anxiety concerning it ceases, and one can surrender oneself, without solicitude or any thought of further effort, to the enjoyment of it. The question, I can see, would not be put, had I adequately conveyed the im-

pression of almost unbroken repose that abides with us for several months of the year. It was because of the abnormal drought that the reposeful period had only just set in, when I wrote on July 10th. But it has continued ever since. Were you to inquire what we have been doing in the Garden that we Love all that time, I should have to reply, 'Nothing, save quietly basking in its beauty,' and we count on another month of this *dolce-far-niente* existence. 'When November comes, I shall have to be up and doing once more, but till then I can continue to repose on the laurels with which Veronica has this year so liberally encircled me.

Between the end of June and the beginning of August, the fair denizens of the garden have, in most years, but to wax in loveliness day after day, and, from the beginning of August till some uncertain date in the second half of October, only to maintain their charm unimpaired. The hand of man can do nothing more for them during that delectable period, and so we have sate and loitered about, reaping 'the harvest of a quiet eye.' Can life bestow anything better? Lamia declares that the amount of energy apparently indispensable to the maintenance of a satis-

factory garden would secure to a man wealth in the market-place, promotion at the Bar, eminence in Politics. Perhaps it would. But if one does not want any of those things? Moreover, would they bring peace and daily contentment in their train, pious evenings, and refreshing, unimportuned sleep? I was pleased to hear the Poet observe the other day that ambition should be spoken of as not the last, but the first infirmity of noble minds, of which they gradually purge themselves as they grow more mature. Never to have had it, therefore, can be no great loss. I am not sure either Veronica or Lamia inwardly assents to this view; for women, even the best of them, have a foible for the more solid proofs of success and for the applause of the world, and a garden, with now and then some modest verses, is but a feeble copy of the pride of life. But good women invariably end by bringing themselves into harmony with the conditions they cannot alter; and as, according to another dictum of the Poet which I heartily endorse, women should be constitutional Sovereigns who reign but do not govern, I think it is true of our little company of kindred spirits, that Veronica's house and garden to us a Kingdom are. I have more

than once heard it generously spoken of as a perfect Paradise, which naturally set Lamia inquiring for the Serpent.

‘The Serpent in the Garden of Eden,’ said the Poet, ‘was, I am quite sure, the feminine craving for perfection in little things; and this unhappy poison Eve communicated to Adam, with the consequences we all know of. I pray you, avoid it.’

Whether this admonition was addressed to Veronica, to me, or indeed to himself, I cannot say. But it is indisputable that the striving after perfection, which reigns supreme indoors, long since found its way into the garden, and has established itself there. Fortunately, I am easily persuaded that perfection has been attained there; and, during the late summer and early autumn weather, Veronica in vain indicates, from time to time, some supposed defect in bed, border, or shrubbery. The season does not lend itself to the restlessness of criticism, but, at most, to regret and resignation. What is the use of being dissatisfied, when you can alter nothing? And what a garden is at the end of July, such it must remain, for good or ill, for the rest of the flowering year. It is the season

When the reaper lays the sickle by,
And taketh down the flail :
When all we prized, and all we planned,
Is ripe and stored at last,
And Autumn looks across the land,
And ponders on the Past.

The tranquillity, as of a well-spent life that is moving toward its close, seems to have descended on the Year, and we participate in its quiet sunny, self-complacent serenity. The decline of existence, if free from struggle, enjoys immunity from comment ; and so it is with a garden in the Autumn. *Bene quodcunque est.* All seems well in a world that we are powerless now to make any better. There is a quiet assurance of unbroken weather, of daily sunshine tempered by white, billowy clouds, that move not, and that contain no menace of rain. The shadows on the lawn are very long, and very soft ; the fruit mellows on the wall ; the sunflowers extend their golden discs athwart the garden-paths ; the second bloom of the roses is more tender, more touching than the first ; the rooks caw slowly, slowly, wending homeward with more deliberate wing ; through gaps in the garden trees one catches glimpses of yellowing barley, or perhaps,

Beyond the pasture's withered bents,
Upstanding hop, recumbent fleece,
And sheaves of wheat, like weathered tents,
A twilight bivouac of peace.

In his *Carmen Seculare*, Horace, while beseeching the Gods to give appropriate blessings to all the sons of Romulus, prays they will grant to old age *placidam quietam*;—words that need no translating. Heaven grants the same timely boon to the waning year, and they are much to be commiserated who do not catch the contagion of quiet pensiveness from the tranquillity of the autumnal season. During it we are all preternaturally silent, Lamia especially, as though we preferred listening to the dropping of an acorn, to the falling of an apple, or to the rustle of a prematurely russet leaf, rather than to our own voices. Veronica exhibits much interest in the ripening fruit, but does so without audible comment, as though she too knew it is too late to suggest any change in the ordering of the year. There are dewy windless mornings, dewy windless eves, and afternoons of motionless tranquillity. Each tapering undeciduous tree has become the style, or hand, of a sundial, and with its invisibly-moving shadow registers the silent hours on the silent lawn. The

Poet seems to be more unoccupied than ever, but is, I daresay, meditating and modulating pensive music that we shall some day hear. I think I am the least quiet, or the least reposeful, of the company, for I wander at times, though very leisurely and devoid of all solicitude, from flower-bed to flower-bed, well satisfied with all I see. The final bloom of the persistently flowering tea-roses arrests my gaze most frequently, for I note they are as various and as interesting in their characters as human beings, whom they in not a little resemble. Some are precocious, some tardy and backward, some most beautiful in June, others most lovely in October. Some are coy and bashful, like children of a certain age, hanging down their heads, so that I have, so to speak, to put my hand under their chin to make them look up and show their innocent fair faces. Some are fearless and self-complacent, and will not let you pass without paying a fresh tribute to their surpassing comeliness. Others again are evidently in some doubt concerning their power to captivate, and look at you with a sidelong glance, happy if you notice them, but not surprised, and hardly disappointed, if you do not. The colour of all of them, I think, is brighter, deeper, and richer in Autumn than at any

other time. When I observe this to Lamia, she replies :

‘Yes, it is a way that waning beauty has. The Year is like some lovely creatures you may have seen, who, as time advances, adorn themselves with garish pigments. I suppose that is as good an explanation as any of the heightened colour of the autumn woods.’

I was glad the Poet was not present when she said this, or I almost think he would have chidden her for her profanity. But I suppose we should grow too sentimental in our attitude towards Nature, if Lamia’s irreverent paradoxes, which still from time to time enliven us, did not act as a corrective to our gravity. It was a prettier thought she had, a day or two later, when she observed that the Year grows a little untidy and careless of herself in Autumn, since, Summer having gone, she is now lone and widowed. Leaves have to be swept up every morning, for, during the chill hour before sunrise, a goodly number of them come rustling to the ground. I saw a very pretty sight, shortly after dawn, this first of October. A hen pheasant, attended by her lord, and followed by a goodly family of fifteen, made slow and stately procession across the lawn, perceiving me



‘LEAVES HAVE TO BE SWEEPED UP’



not, nor aware it was probably their funeral one. I took care not to disturb them, but watched them curiously till they strode solemnly into the cover of Poet's Walk, and disappeared.

I am not sure the mellow grace of Autumn is not best seen in the walled kitchen garden, where sunflowers and hollyhocks, by reason of their height, are the most noticeable objects ; where the scarlet-runners, still in gorgeous bloom, and the sweet peas that yet hold out, harmonise so well with the red-brick wall, and tawny pear, purple plum, and crimsoning peach and nectarine, insert effective colour among the sobering leaves. I have not yet succeeded in carrying out Lamia's suggestion, which you may possibly remember, of converting this portion of our modest demesne into a Queen Anne pleasaunce. But I am insidiously moving in that direction, trusting that Veronica will not perceive my purpose till it is well-nigh accomplished. Alleging, with perfect truth, that the raspberry canes have never done as well as they should in that quarter, I have transferred them elsewhere ; and kindred changes have been made, with excuses equally plausible. But the most satisfactory innovation has been the doing away with the asphalt on the walks, and laying

down red brick paths instead. At all times the change is grateful to the eye, more especially as I have made the paths a trifle narrower, and so broadened the strip between them and the espalier trees which I dedicate to flowers. These now hang over, and intrude on, the red brick in careless autumnal fashion, and the effect is so pleasing, I go many times a day to gaze on it. It is here that flowers I have practically banished from the garden proper, scarlet geraniums and yellow calceolarias, seem so thoroughly in their place ; though in their splendid society are annuals and perennials of more modest hue. It is here, too, that late-flowering Victoria Cross and Peony Poppies, or pale Larkspurs flowering a second time, arrest the attention, and pay parting homage to the dwindling of the Year. I notice that Lamia feels the significance and charm of Autumn fully as much as I do, for only yesterday she exclaimed :

Give me October's meditative haze,
Its gossamer mornings, dewy-wimpled eves,
Dewy and fragrant, fragrant and secure,
The long slow sound of farmward-wending wains,
When homely Love sups quiet 'mid his sheaves,
Sups 'mid his sheaves, his sickle at his side,
And all is peace, peace and plump fruitfulness.

Occasionally, even in the placid autumnal period, the wind will rise and partly rife before their time the yellowing foliage. It was on an occasion of this kind that the Poet wrote the following impromptu verses :—

TO THE AUTUMN WIND

O envious Autumn wind, to blow
From covert vale and woodland crest
The mellow leaves, just as they glow
Brightest and loveliest ;
To strip the maples black and bare,
To rob the beeches' russet gold,
And make what was of late so fair
But rustling drift and dripping mould.

Yet if, as you have done with them,
With me you will but timely do,
I will no more your rage condemn,
But, rather, make my peace with you.
Let me not linger on, to know
The mournfulness of feelings lost,
But waft me, while as yet they glow,
Wise Autumn wind, from winter frost !

‘I observe,’ said Lamia to him, ‘you never attempt a new metre, but always write in the measures consecrated by usage.’

‘You could not,’ he replied, ‘have used a

more instructive phrase than "consecrated by usage." I should say it contains the complete exculpation of one's practice.'

'What an incorrigible old Tory you are!' she exclaimed.

'If so,' he rejoined, 'it is only in so far as I acknowledge my indebtedness to the Past, and have not the presumption to think I was sent into this world to turn it topsy-turvy. A great many things were settled for all time, long before you and I came into it, and among these are the metres of an ancient language. No one invented them, nor can any one invent satisfactory new ones now. They arose, naturally and spontaneously, out of the genius of the language, and have for generations been part of our mother-tongue and our mother-music. The English language and English metres, consecrated, as you well say, by immemorial usage, were awaiting me, as they await us all, a splendid inheritance, and I am content, in my humble way, to preserve that patrimony unimpaired without adding to it. But indeed, to add to it is impossible, unless one be enamoured of spurious coinage. I have heard some people say there must be a certain amount of artifice, and therefore some little lack of simplicity

and even of sincerity, in writing verse at all. To such persons I can only humbly reply that there are moments when I, at least, find it more simple and more sincere to write in verse than in prose, and when, indeed, I find myself writing, and therefore I suppose it is natural and inevitable to express oneself, in metre. But then the metre must be bone of one's bone and flesh of one's flesh, bequeathed by a long line of English-speaking ancestors, taught one by one's mother and one's nurse, and fostered by every word one has ever heard uttered, and by every page one has ever read.'

'Yet,' interposed Veronica, with, I think, a touch of subdued sarcasm, 'I have seen writers spoken of as peculiarly original, because they wrote in new metres.'

'Originality of that kind is easily attained,' said the Poet. 'True originality is not to be reached by striving after it. A man is original or he is not, as it happens, and as Heaven pleases; but, if he be original, he will be so without knowing it, and his originality will be shown in what we call the whole man, not in an assumed and startling vesture. I do not suppose, Lamia, that new metres would, for even a passing hour,

ever win the public ear. But, if they did, we should have to content ourselves with waiting for the revival of the fittest.'

But we do not remain quite imprisoned in the Garden, satisfying though we find it. We take long afternoon drives, and generally halt on the way to look at some rustic church or other, for the sacred edifices that are dotted about the country parts of England at brief distances have a peculiar attraction for all of us.

Starting, as we always do, from a district where woods and deer-parks are perhaps the most noticeable features, we drove one afternoon for the better part of fifteen miles through a country where village churches, and here and there a picturesque cottage whose date it is difficult to assign, constitute the sole interest of the scene. Halting at one of the former, we were handed the key, and were left to make our way alone to the church, which is not in the village, but in private ground hard by, and all fee for the loan of it was refused. I noticed several early eighteenth century tombstones, with sententious Latin epitaphs, over the progenitors of folk who to-day are innocent of any dead language, or, indeed, of any living one save their own. They have reverted, I presume, to a

more primitive type of culture. It raised a smile, too, to read a long and eulogistic inscription to a husband on the main face of a sepulchral monument, and then to perceive, at the back of it, the briefest possible allusion to the wife, of whom it was curtly stated that she was 'virtuous and discreet.' Lamia walked round to see if, on some still more obscure slab, it was not recorded that she was a good housekeeper. Not that to be 'virtuous and discreet' is not an excellent thing in woman, but one would rather the modesty were her own than the indication of the man's sense of her due subordination. In the same church is a monument whereon it is recorded of another person, presumably in obedience to her own wish, that 'Her sole desire was to make a good wife and good mother.' Could there be a nobler ambition? These old fourteenth-century churches, their nave, their chancel, their belfry, their silent sepulchres and brasses, their sometimes judicious but oftener misconceived restorations, their clamorous jackdaws, their circling swifts, their God's-acre, with unsophisticated tags of pious rhyme and newly-deposited tributes of flowers, are all of them haunts of ancient peace. After you have criticised a badly-restored roodloft here, found fault with a

sadly-tampered-with clerestory there, and vented your sorrow over the unconscious desecration by some local or even world-known architect of windows that evidently were once Early English, you insensibly fall into a mood of unquestioning assent. The *genius loci* is too strong for critical analysis. The prayers of centuries seem hovering around the place; the loves of long-ago are lying at your feet; the patriarchal Past folds you in its soft and subduing embrace. Were it not for its thirteenth and fourteenth century churches, such a tract of country as I speak of would want for history, and lack significance. As it is, they link it with the national annals and the national life. Without their churches, the villages, the hamlets, the solitary farmsteads, would seem to have no family tie, to be stolid and inarticulate. Community of feeling is maintained by the grey church-tower they all can see; community of pathos and pious seriousness, by the churchyard which belongs to and awaits them all. How comely are the graves, and how eloquent of respect, even where they betray the curious absence of tasteful instinct in a reverent race. The tombstones of the less well-to-do offend the least; for want of means is often a sure protection against

vulgarity. The plain slab, the plainly-engraved name and date, and then the simple flowers, the best they have,—how well these accord with the spot! Survivors less straitened in means sometimes plant geraniums, begonias, lobelias, and china-asters, in formal patterns, above the graves of their dead, thereby producing an effect of painful incongruity. In the churchyard, that afternoon, I observed a singularly pleasing decoration to a grave. It took the place of a tombstone, and consisted of a recumbent cross of golden yew.

‘The combative character of the English race,’ said the Poet, as we turned away from the church and its comely rectory embosomed in old-world elms, ‘accounts to one for many things in our public life of to-day which would otherwise remain inexplicable. But I fail to comprehend the polemical temper that drives men to have a quarrel with the Church, especially in its character of spiritual companion of the State. If the Church were intolerant and exclusive, I could then understand its arousing jealous and resentful passions. But its most striking characteristic is its indulgent comprehensiveness, its gospel of forbearance and universal peace. Fancy men, in these only too discordant and anarchical days, wanting to do

away with one of the only two remaining symbols of our National Unity.'

'What is the other?' asked Veronica.

'Surely, the Crown,' he answered.

'You forget the Mother of Free Parliaments,' added Lamia, 'and that House of Commons we all venerate, and which sits, because, I suppose, a House divided against itself cannot stand.'

'You are incorrigible, Lamia!' said Veronica. 'But we must be turning homeward. Who is going to drive with whom?'

Lamia fell to my lot, and entertained me for a couple of hours with that curious mixture of seriousness and irrelevance that imparts, for me at least, a not unwelcome savour to her discourse. I observe she is much influenced by vicissitudes of time and atmosphere, and that she rarely is flippanant after sundown. As the twilight deepened, she seemed to go back in spirit to the churchyard we had now for some little time quitted, and ended by repeating to me the following sonnet, which it seems the Poet had recently written out for her :—

Why should I, from this long and losing strife
When summoned to depart, halt half-afraid ?
Death is full quittance for the debts of life,
Discharging the account, though still unpaid.

Who is it that can say he still hath met
Friendship's just claim and Duty's punctual call?
How little do we give for what we get,
And but for Death we should be bankrupts all!
For loan of life the richest but compound,
Love's priceless gift we but repay in part;
Beggared and bare our balance would be found,
If all we owe were honoured by the heart.
Die, and the lenders our default forget,
Nay, though defrauded, then deem theirs the debt.

'Do you think,' she said, 'he really feels that? he, so enamoured of life, and so eager to keep his account with it still open?'

'I suppose,' I answered, 'he felt it at the time he wrote it. Do *you* always feel the same, or think the same, concerning the same subject?'

'Most certainly not,' she answered.

'Then have you not furnished the answer to your own question? It is the peculiarity, I imagine some would say the privilege, of poets, to feel what everybody feels, to think what everybody thinks, and to know what everybody knows. I have heard the writer of the sonnet you have just recited affirm that poets are perhaps the only persons who may contradict themselves indefinitely without exposing themselves to the reproach of inconsist-

ency. Had you been a man, Lamia, I almost think you would have been a poet.'

To this remark she made no reply, maintaining a meditative silence for the rest of the drive.

December 18th.

IT has been decided that Lamia must not pass the Winter and, still more, the early Spring months in England ; a decision which, pathetic in any case, would have bred no little disappointment in my breast, but for the determination of Veronica and the Poet to accompany her. I am thereby enabled likewise to be of the party ; but, as we do not start till after Christmas Day, I have had ample time in which to make due provision for the future needs of the Garden. November is to the judicious cultivator of plants and flowers the busiest and most important period of the twelvemonth, and I have done my utmost to turn it to due account. What my labours have had of novelty in them it will be time enough to say, should they prove to be successful. If I fail, I shall not be able to lay the disaster at the door of an inauspicious season. November was a wonderfully open month,

and so hitherto has been December. We have had but little rain, and absolutely no frost ; and, had it not been necessary to remove many of the things from the beds and borders from regard to the interests of another year, I verily believe the fair autumnal aspect of Veronica's Garden would have been prolonged without a change till now, when we are close on Christmas. Even as it is, it would be impossible for the most accurate and experienced observer to surmise the time of year from either cursory or minute survey. The ruddy torches of the Flame Flower are still alight in Poet's Corner, and close to them the delicate Ceanothus retains its exquisitely blue blossoms. The Blue Polyanthus, to which Veronica is so much attached, since she discovered it for us in Ireland and domesticated it here, is in full beauty, as indeed are Primulas, and Polyanthus Primroses, of many kinds. To-day I positively saw a belated *Datura* in flower, and gathered, not violets only, but mignonette as well. The *Steinbergia lutea* and the *Schizostylis* refuse to recognise that it is December, and I have carried in a bowlful of Madame Bérard and Gloire de Dijon roses. Pentstemons and *Antirrhinums* abound ; and, by the side of the yellow-flowering Jessamine, the honeysuckle is

coming into new leaf. Add to these, Auriculas, Sweet-Williams, Calliopsis, Cranesbills, ivy-leafed Geraniums, Marigolds, and, as a matter of course, Christmas Roses or Winter Hellebore. As for the thrushes, they are singing as though it were Valentine's Day. You must not suppose I have exhausted the list of our December flowers, but I fear to be tedious if I tell you more. The Poet, you may be quite sure, avails himself of these exceptional phenomena to glorify the English climate, which he maintains is the best in the world, and he asks why we are going to Italy, whose climate, he adds, is detestable, though no doubt it enjoys much fine weather. This distinction between weather and climate is certainly ingenious and, possibly, accurate; but I fear it runs too counter to long-standing beliefs, and to conventional language, to be accepted of the people. Veronica, who sometimes, though rarely, takes courage to differ from the Poet, declares it is nonsense. Lamia, who never agrees with Veronica about anything, since Veronica is nearly always right, says, more indulgently, it is a poetic license, which, like all license, she adds, imparts a pleasing variety to the monotonous morality and tedious reasonableness of existence.

Christmas Eve.

STILL no snow, nor frost, nor hail, nor any breath of wintry wind; and the Poet indulges his habit of imaginative generalisation by belauding the exceptional season, as though December always did, and in future always will, visit us in this Ausonian fashion. He has long been addicted to calling the nooks in Veronica's Garden *sedes quietæ*; and he now goes on, in a tone of triumphant serenity,

Quas neque concutiant venti; neque nubila nimbis
Adspargunt; neque nix acri concreta pruina
Cana cadens violat: semperque innubilus æther
Integit, et large diffuso lumine ridet.

And, when Lamia says these lines sound so magnificently melodious she would like to know what they mean, he tells her she will find them partly rendered, and with much musical effect, in Tennyson:

Where never creeps a cloud, nor moves a wind,
Nor ever falls the least white star of snow,
Nor ever lowest roll of thunder moans.

Indeed, so unseasonable is the weather, we might this Christmas Eve deck the walls with roses rather than with holly, if we so wished.

But, as you know, we stand upon the ancient ways. Though Veronica prides herself on not allowing any intimation from the offices to penetrate our portion of the house, the Poet, whose senses are curiously acute, has confided to me that he is sure he can smell mince-pies, and I believe he is right ; and to-morrow it will be as much a sacred obligation with us to eat the Roast Beef and the Plum Pudding of Old England, as it is this evening to place holly branches with their bright berries over the picture-frames, and to hang in the hall the Mistletoe Bough, bedecked with apples and oranges. Village children, in threes and fours, come to the Hall-door, in the genial darkness, and sing Christmas Carols. They follow each other in rapid succession, and I suspect some of them come more than once, for they are never sent empty-handed away. The door might as well be left open, for we are perpetually going to open it,—all saving Lamia, who is not allowed to do so,—to greet and be greeted by a fresh batch of youngsters, singing,

For it is in Christmas time
That friends travel far and near :
So God bless you, and send you
A Happy New Year !

The Poet tries to catch from the innocent young voices all the traditional old-world verses, taught them by their mothers and grandmothers, that he can, and much prefers them to his own. Finally, about ten o'clock we have the village Bell-Ringers, led by Old Mummery, who every Christmas goes solemnly through the comedy of asking us what tunes we should prefer. But, as we well know that he and his mates play but three, and always the same three, we invariably ask for these in succession, and, when they have been played through once, we always beg that one of them may be played over again. Then the ringers are highly complimented on their performance, and are given five shillings, and there is a reiterated exchange of 'A Merry Christmas, and A Happy New Year!' 'The same to you!' 'And many of them!' And then the front-door is shut, and the curtains are drawn, and we belong to ourselves once again.

The Poet does not often recite to us any of his own compositions unless expressly invited by us to do so. But to-night he spontaneously said he wanted to read us some verses, and we, with the heartiness of the Yuletide season, begged that he would do so. These were they:—

IN VERONICA'S GARDEN

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

I

Hark ! In the air, around, above,
The Angelic Music soars and swells,
And, in the Garden that I love,
I hear the sound of Christmas Bells.

II

From hamlet hollow, village height,
The silvery Message seems to start,
And, far away, its notes to-night
Are surging through the city's heart.

III

Assurance clear to those who fret
O'er vanished Faith and feelings fled,
That not in English homes is yet
Tradition dumb, or Reverence dead :

IV

Nor, when anew from town-girt tower
Or fen-swept spire the Yule-bells peal,
Are those who watch o'er England's power
Too wise to pray, too proud to kneel.

V

Now onward floats the sacred tale,
Past leafless woodlands, freezing rills ;
It wakes from sleep the silent vale,
It skims the mere, it scales the hills ;

VI

And, rippling on up rings of space,
Sounds faint and fainter as more high,
Till mortal ear no more may trace
The music homeward to the sky.

VII

To courtly roof and rustic cot
Old comrades wend from far and wide :
Now is the ancient feud forgot,
The growing grudge is laid aside.

VIII

Bright on the board the gifts are spread,
The flagons gleam, the trenchers smoke ;
The boar's is now the laurelled head,
Now is the Feast of simple folk.

IX

The agèd tell of ancient cheer,
And boast 'twas merrier then than now ;
The children shout 'A glad New Year !'
And kiss beneath the berried bough.

X

But, in the pauses of their mirth,
The Heavenly Hymn is carolled still :
'Glory to God on high, on Earth
Peace, and to all mankind good-will.'

XI

Peace and good-will 'twixt rich and poor!
Good-will and peace 'twixt class and class!
Let old with new, let Prince with boor,
Send round the bowl, and drain the glass!

XII

That still behind the steely sea,
That guards our greatness like a sword,
The free-born children of the free
May own one law, one land, one lord;

XIII

And never in our midst may sound
Discordant voice or threat morose,
But every Year that circles round
May find and bind us yet more close.

XIV

But not alone for those who still
Within the Mother-Land abide,
We deck the porch, we dress the sill,
And fling the portals open wide.

XV

But unto all of British blood,—
Whether they cling to Egbert's Throne,
Or, far beyond the Western flood,
Have reared a Sceptre of their own,



XVI

And, half-regretful, yearn to win
Their way back home, and fondly claim
The rightful share of kith and kin
In Alfred's glory, Shakespeare's fame,—

XVII

We pile the logs, we troll the stave,
We waft the tidings wide and far,
And speed the wish, on wind and wave,
To Southern Cross and Northern Star.

XVIII

Yes! Peace on earth, Atlantic strand!
Peace and good-will, Pacific shore!
Across the waters stretch your hand,
And be our brothers more and more!

XIX

Blood of our blood, in every clime!
Race of our race, by every sea!
To you we sing the Christmas rhyme,
For you we light the Christmas-tree.

December 26th.

I HEARD Lamia's voice at a preternaturally early hour this morning, and while I myself was still at peace with my pillow, and at first concluded she

was occupied betimes with those final arrangements among trunks and boxes so characteristic of feminine solicitude on the occasion of a projected journey. But, shortly, she knocked vehemently at my door, and called through it :

‘Come to the study, for I have something wonderful to show you.’

By the time I had made myself speciously fit for Lamia’s gaze, I found she had been clamouring at the Poet’s door likewise, and he, like myself, was now standing in the passage. Lamia led us both to his study, drew up the blinds, and lo ! we looked on a snow-white world !

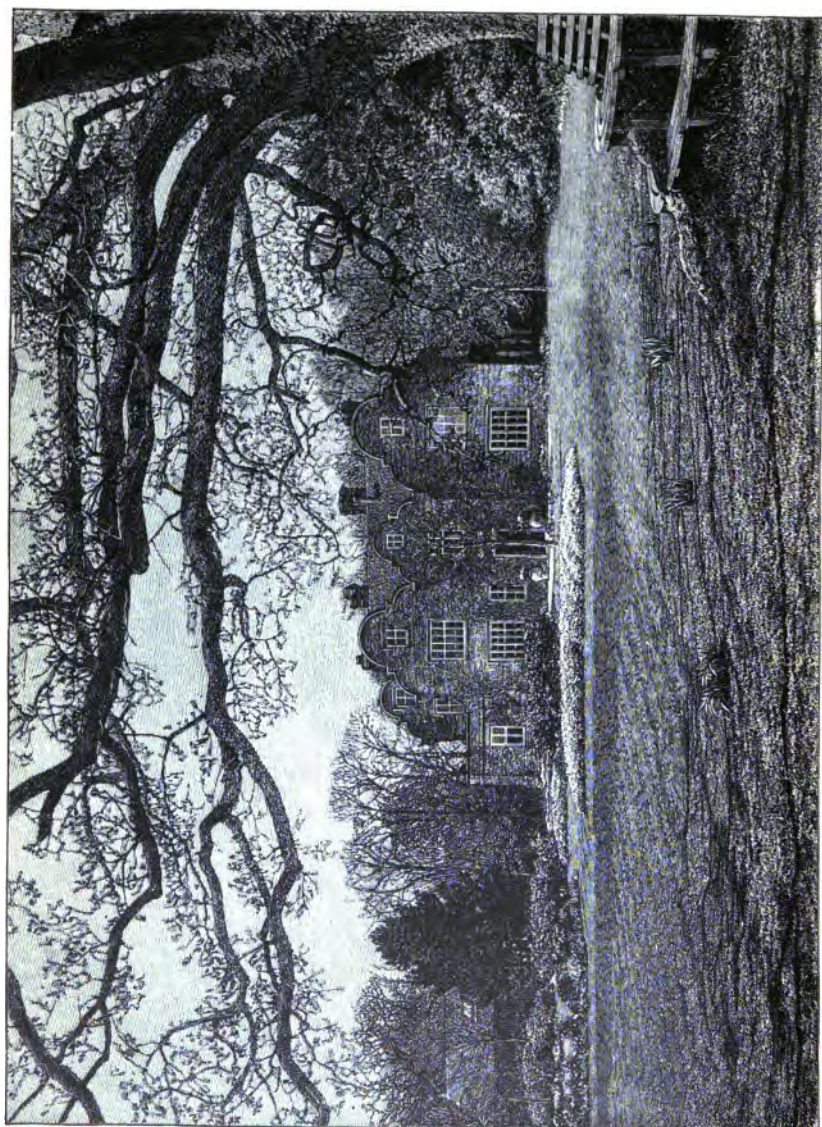
‘How about your English climate now ?’ she asked. ‘And do you still want to know why we are going to Italy ?’

‘How delightful !’ the Poet replied ; ‘quite delightful to see dear old England in her winter garb before we go ! Thus we shall have the crowning luxury of change and contrast.’ Then exclaiming, with swift accommodation of his mind to the affections of the moment, ‘*Italiam petimus !*’ he went on :

Hic ver assiduum, atque alienis mensibus æstas.

And I, not to be outdone, continued :





‘A RATHER MOURNFUL-LOOKING MANOR-HOUSE’

Adde tot egregias urbes, operumque laborem,
Tot congesta manu præruptis oppida saxis,
Fluminaque antiquos subterlabentia muros.

‘If you are going to talk unknown tongues,’
said Lamia, ‘I shall go to bed again, and am not
sure I shall go to Italy at all!’

Two hours later we were being borne on noise-
less wheels down the orchard drive; and the last
thing we saw, as we passed through the gate at the
end of it, was a rather mournful-looking Manor-
house, and the men, with long poles, shaking the
superincumbent snow from the muffled evergreens,
in Veronica’s Garden.

THE END



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EDITED, WITH A PREFACE,

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EXTRACT FROM THE PREFACE

"A nobly filial love of Country, and a tenderly passionate *love of the country*—these appear to me the two dominant notes of this volume. The phrases themselves stand for things widely different, but it seems fated that the things themselves should be found present together or together absent. . . . Our literature prior to Lord Tennyson contains no such full utterance of this dual passion, this enthusiasm of nationality underlying an intimate and affectionate knowledge of every bird that makes an English summer melodious, and every flower that sweetens English air; and it seems to me that if the question be asked, 'Who among the poets of a later generation can be said to share with Lord Tennyson the quality of being in this double sense English through and through?' any competent person trying to answer the question honestly will find the name of the author of this volume of *English Lyrics* the first to rise to his lips.

"Mr. Alfred Austin would seem to love England none the less, but rather the more, because he has also felt the spell of other countries with a keenness only possible in natures which present a wide surface to impressions. In *The Human Tragedy* he has projected himself by imaginative sympathy into the very life and spirit of the land

and 'Where Milan's spires go up to heaven like prayer,'

'Where once-proud Genoa sits beside the sea.'

EXTRACT FROM THE PREFACE

But that very poem, full of Italian feeling and aglow with Italian colour as it is, opens with a chant of English springtime which is assuredly hard to match outside its author's own vernal verse. As pictures to hang up in one's mental gallery side by side with the exquisite 'spring' of *The Human Tragedy*, perhaps one would choose the autumn landscapes in *Love's Widowhood*, though some of these are harder to detach without loss or injury from their setting, being not so much examples of deliberate description as of that rarer art by which a poem is saturated with autumnal sentiment till the lines seem to rustle with fallen foliage, and their melody to come muffled through an indolent September haze.

"Mr. Alfred Austin may in a special sense be styled the laureate of the English seasons, for he seems equally happy whether he be championing our northern April against the onslaught of a critic who had fallen foul of that best-abused of months in an evening journal, or colouring his verse with the gravely gorgeous pigments of the time when nature seems sunk in reverie, and leaf by leaf the pageant of verdure crumbles down, or painting for us (*etching* would perhaps be the better word) the likeness of earth in that interval of apparent quiescence or suspended life, when her pinched and haggard features have put on an ascetic severity, and she seems to be doing penance alike for her summer revelries and the extravagant pomps of autumn,—when

'in the sculptured woodland's leafless aisles
The robin chants the vespers of the year.'

Thus it is that he seems among modern poets especially and saliently English, in the sense in which most of our best singers, from Chaucer onwards, have been English; a sense implying neither insularity nor prejudice nor any resistance of foreign impressions, but an out-of-door breeziness and freedom such as bring with them an almost physical consciousness of enlargement and space. None have imbibed more deeply than he the spirit of Italy, or surrendered themselves with franker gusto to the intoxication of southern air, yet when he comes back to these shores he comes back

'Blessing the brave bleak land where he was born,'

somewhat as a loiterer in courts and palaces might return with a newly-quickened affection to the hearth and rafters of an unforgotten rustic

EXTRACT FROM THE PREFACE

home. Whatsoever is worthily and nobly English is endeared to him by every early association and innate prepossession, but most of all the older and simpler modes of our national life, when still unmenaced with displacement by less comely and more mechanical conditions. The old-world charm and grace which yet ennoble the labours of tilth and husbandry; the kindly charities of rustic good-neighbourhood and human relations of cottage and farm and hall; the unique blending of stateliness and homeliness which makes the rural abodes of the gentle class in this country seem the most delectable of possible dwelling-places;—all these things are found mirrored in this poet's verse, not with any conventional idealisation, but with such simple faithfulness to the fact as is natural in one to whom the fact is as familiar as it is dear. And together with these things, but oftener felt as an implicit presence than overtly uttered, is the underlying sentiment of England's greatness on the historic and constitutional side, the enthusiasm for whatever is splendid and heroic in 'our rude island-story,' the chivalric passion of loyalty and allegiance which flames up in quick resentment if any affront be offered to the object of its devotion—as witness the noble sonnet 'To England,' written at the moment when the action of a great British minister, in despatching our Fleet to the Black Sea and calling out the Reserves, checked the advance of Russia upon Constantinople.

'Men deemed thee fallen, did they?'

he asks—

'Not wholly shorn of strength, but vainly strong,'

and lapped in the luxury of a fool's paradise, because secure, in the last resort,

'Behind the impassable fences of the foam.'

But 'thou dost but stand erect,' he says, and the interloper falls back foiled, while 'the nations cluster round,' and above them

'Thou, 'mid thy sheaves in peaceful seasons stored,
Towerest supreme, victor without a blow,
Smilingly leaning on thy undrawn sword.'

"This is the language, and these the feelings, of a man who has not taken up patriotism as a theme whereon he can conveniently and

EXTRACT FROM THE PREFACE

effectively descant, but whose habitual mood is one of proud thankfulness in belonging to a country where, if anywhere, he may feel

‘The dignity of being alive.’

“Wordsworth has told us how,

‘Among the many movements of his mind,

there were times at which he felt for England ‘as a lover or a child.’ It is as a lover that Mr. Austin habitually regards her, and if to a lover’s fervour he unites somewhat of a lover’s unconsciousness of any blemish in the worshipped face or form, such partiality is a thing we should be loth to exchange for any spirit of more coolly critical appraisal. Readers familiar with his whole contribution to poetry do not, however, need to be told that such emotion of heart in the presence of this ideal mistress is with him, as with Wordsworth, but one of ‘many movements’ which in their entirety represent a wide circuit of thought and feeling. In *The Human Tragedy* alone the complexity of elements is such as would have begotten in the work of an inferior artist an inevitable obscurity of design or incoherence of detail. Yet that poem assimilates easily into its narrative fabric such multifarious material as the collision of faith and reason; the conflict between human love and transcendental passion in a soul dedicated to heavenly uses but drawn aside for a time by an earthly emotion; the secret of the subtle spell exercised by Catholicism upon a pure and radiant human spirit which knows Doubt but as a shadow and Sin as a rumour; the immense, tragic irony of chance, as seen in the bewildered crossing and fortuitous overlapping of human lives, with all their momentous mutual interaction; the passionate abnegation or splendid immolation of self in the service of a great public cause; the heroic spectacle of a people that have long lain ‘pillowed on their past’ rising at the sudden summons of an idea to incarnate their dream of unity and freedom; the clash of theories, the dissonance of parties, the shock of hosts on the field;—such are some of the constituents of a poem, the monumental scale of which, and the variety of its component parts, are not more remarkable than the artistic fusion of so large a mass of material as its argument comprehends.”

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